a dead spot of light magazine

No. XXVIII // 2026.1

Introduction

Rotten. The world has become rotten. What else is there to say about current events? It would be nice to open with some positive thoughts, but I could ramble on for a good many pages. Truth be told, what would be the benefit of it? Not that it would matter much or lead to anything. So, I had better not do it.

On the interviews:
First of all, I would like to thank the bands for answering the questions for the interviews and especially Bellaras (whose latest release was in 2010) and Disemballerina, who outdid themselves with a really lengthy response and this from a band, which has also not been particularly active over the last few years. That Judu responded to my request was a bit of a surprise as well and that Rahel Talts went to such lengths in her response was also something I did not expect. To sum this up: four very different interviews.

On the review side:
I stumbled over some Hungarian bands in the last couple of weeks prior to the release date, and I simply had to write about their albums. Also, a jazz section reappears in this edition, because I like to challenge myself; and that one really did take a turn. Sometimes two notes can bring someone to the point of questioning one's sanity; it really happened that way. Wapstan and a review of Kali Malone's "The Sacrificial Code" would have been nice, but I did not have the time to write the latter.

On the tech behind this magazine:
A lot has happened in terms of the building process. The Python and the Typst setup have been refined, and I really like how the header elements of the interviews/reviews look now. The QR code with the small border around it and how it is placed is quite good. I wanted to go to a conference in Berlin earlier this year to give a talk about my building engine, but ended up not going, because of time constraints. Yet, I plan to write a bit about it soon.

Metal Archives Graphs:
I have finally released a new version of the "Metal Archives Graphs" and it looks great:

https://metal-archives-graphs.neocities.org

There will be more updates to come, but for the moment, the focus is on other things.

Since people approached me about supporting me, you can do that under the ko-fi as well as the substack link below.

I hope you find some joy and inspiration from the strange lines that I have written in this magazine. Feedback is always appreciated, and please do not hesitate to contact me.

Next edition? Around the end of June 2026, probably.

Source of the cover artwork:

https://archive.org/details/mma_soldier_playing_the_theorbo_437050
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Interviews & Reviews

Bellaras

UK | Funeral Doom Metal, Death Metal

Bandcamp: `https://bellaras.bandcamp.com/`

Q: Thank you for making time for this. Bellaras has been quiet for a while — can you introduce yourself and tell us a bit about the band's history?

Bellaras is a solo funeral doom project which took form in the late 2000s. The first album titled The Thousand Tombs of a Broken God was released in 2010, followed by a single track "Wretch Asylum" on a compilation album for Ominous Silence in 2012. The project has laid somewhat dormant since, although I have a partially recorded album which remains to be completed.

Q: Where does the name Bellaras come from, and what does it mean to you?

The name Bellaras is meaningless and serves only as a necessity of the project to have a title. The word is something which came into my head one day and I liked the idea of something which sounds interesting yet has no pre-defined meaning or expectations.

Q: Bellaras formed in Belfast in 2009. What was the local scene like at the time, and what drew you to funeral doom and death metal specifically?

The local metal scene in Belfast has been small but stable. Some bands which would have been around at the time are Mourning Beloveth, War Iron, and Wreck of the Hesperus. The atmosphere and heaviness of funeral doom is what initially drew me towards it. For death metal it would have been the technicality of the music, although there's none of it in Bellaras.

Q: What were your main influences when you started the band, and have these shifted over the years?

My main influences at the time would have been bands like Wormphlegm, Ophis, LDRTFS, Mourning Beloveth, Loss, Worship, and many others. I wouldn't say my root influences have changed over the years, but the newer music I have planned is less on the raw end of the spectrum.

Q: "The Thousand Tombs of a Broken God" is a striking title. What is the story behind it, and how does it connect to the music and lyrics?

The title refers to all the religions and gods which have existed throughout time. All the many religions lay claim to the one true god, yet they have nothing to show for it other than the death, destruction, and hatred left behind. Maybe many years ago there was once a true religion with a true god, but it has now been long dead, buried, and forgotten.

Q: The cover artwork depicts a person watching someone hanging from a tree, rendered in a very dark colorization. It is quite arresting. What is the story behind it, and did you have a hand in its creation?

The artwork is based on a vision I had after several days with very little sleep. I was in a forest at night and due to the lack of sleep I was almost hallucinating. All the shadows and dark outlines of the trees were turning into strange shapes, and one in particular stood out. There was a faceless man wearing a suit, with his hands in his pockets. He was standing emotionless beside his child who was hanging from a tree. Something about how bleak yet calm the image was really stuck with me. I had no hand in the creation of the artwork itself, which was made by my friend at Ominous Silence Records.

Q: Your sound on the demo sits somewhere between funeral doom and death metal, but with a more Gothic character — keyboards, multiple vocal styles, a certain atmosphere not entirely unlike Thergothon but with a different edge. How would you describe Bellaras's sound yourself, and was that direction something that developed naturally or was it a conscious decision?

It's interesting how you've described the album. I've always seen it as an entirely funeral doom album but looking at it now I can see how there's some unintended death metal influences. The first album had no self-imposed restrictions of what it could sound like, but it was always intended to be a funeral doom album, and some other influences may have worked their way in. I listen to a lot of doom/death/black so it's only natural that aspects of these genres would appear. The newer recordings build upon the previous album, both in songwriting and production.

Q: The demo was self-released on tape. How did that come about, and how was it received at the time?

There's several reasons for this, mainly necessity. I didn't like the idea of shopping around for a record label and so self-releasing was the only option. As I was self-funding the release I couldn't afford the costs of printing a run of CDs. I was attracted to something about the rawness of cassette tapes rather than burning a bunch of CDs, and the sound quality seemed to lend itself well to the music. The album isn't a recording which benefits from the clarity of a CD, and there's some albums where I've preferred the worsened cassette quality over the higher quality CD/digital release. There has never been a great deal of interest in the band or the release, which is partially down to lack of advertising or promotion on my part. The small level of interest has been through word of mouth from those who have stumbled across the band through whatever means.

Q: There has been a considerable period of inactivity since the demo. What happened, and what kept Bellaras from continuing?

Solo projects have pros and cons. On one hand I'm not held back by anybody else, but on the other hand there's nobody to keep me on track to ensure things get finished. I've been working on other projects like Writhing Void but these other bands also fall into the trap of being left unfinished when something else comes up. These things tend to work in circles and when the time comes back to Bellaras, I revisit the old recordings and build upon them but it's taken quite some time to get a full album written and recorded. There's nothing preventing the release of a new album other than myself.

Q: You mentioned a partially recorded album. Can you tell us a bit about it — when was it recorded, what direction does the music take, and what has prevented it from being completed?

I started working on a second album shortly after TTTOABG was released, so most of what I have so far was recorded between 2011 and 2013. Small bits and pieces have been added over the years when I've felt inspired. Currently I have 2 or 3 finished instrumentals totalling around 25 minutes, and about 10 other songs which are in various stages of creation. Both life and other musical projects have got in the way and prevented the

recordings from being finished but it's something which has always been on my mind. The new songs have better production value so it's not as raw sounding as TTTOABG. It's a lot heavier sounding and a little more melodic. The song "Wretch Asylum" from the 2012 compilation album on Ominous Silence was initially written for the new album so it's a pretty good indication of the direction the new music is heading.

Q: Is finishing and releasing that album something you are actively working toward, or is it more of a distant possibility at this point?

I plan to finish the recording of the album but it's not something I'm actively working on. I've added bits and pieces to it over the years when I've felt inspired but there's still plenty to do. I'd like to find the time to finish it but I don't imagine it'll happen any time this year.

Q: Is Bellaras a solo project or does it involve other members? If others have been involved over the years, how has that shaped the music?

Bellaras has always been an entirely solo project. I have no plans to collaborate with or include anybody.

Q: What is next for Bellaras?

The main priority would be finishing the recording of the 2nd album, although it's uncertain how the existing recordings may be chopped or changed as some of them are 15 years old at this point and I may feel differently about them when they're revisited. There's enough half-finished music to fill more than one album, so once things get rolling to finish the 2nd album, a 3rd may come shortly after.

Bellaras — The Thousand Tombs Of A Broken God

UK | Funeral Doom Metal, Death Metal | 2010

Release: `https://bellaras.bandcamp.com/album/the-thousand-tombs-of-a-broken-god`

It was the cover that caught my attention and which motivated me to download this release. Anyway, the depiction of a man standing next to a hung woman (?) together with this very dark colourization is certainly something that invites some curiosity. By merely glancing over it and letting your mind get impressed by this arrangement, your thoughts wander off and ideas begin to unfold.

What about the music? Is it able to reflect this grim scenery in an appropriate way? Can something of this depressive atmosphere be found in the compositions? The Metal Archives site is a bit misleading in this respect, because the band was labelled as playing 'doom metal'. Even though there is some truth to this, the general approach is much broader; the band sounds nothing like Candlemass, Electric Wizard, or similar acts. Bellaras play death/doom of a slow kind. This means occasional blasts and such rarely appear. Instead, the riffs progress forward without giving an impression of much haste; 'Pain through Madness' is an exception in some respect. Despite the considerable rawness of the art, the music remains heavy and intense without becoming 'crushing,' maintaining a laid-back quality that avoids being overly aggressive or depressive. Furthermore, solo parts, keyboard play, samples of various types, numerous vocal styles and such can be found. The band is not far from Thergothon in concept, sound, and atmosphere, but has a more Gothic touch. Combine the music of the Finns with a bit of the vibe of Sisters of Mercy and change the minimalist growls to something with more punch, then you get a good impression of how Bellaras sound. The aforementioned 'Pain through Madness' has some really nice and otherworldly keyboard motives, while both intro and outro work fine with the overall dark atmosphere on the tape.

This demo is quite good actually and especially recommended to those who have a certain fancy for slow, intense metal music.

Judu

Lithuania | Alternative, Post-Punk, Shoegaze

Bandcamp: `https://judu.bandcamp.com/`

Q: Why don't you introduce yourself? Who is behind Judu, and where does the name come from?

We are a four member band. Domantas – electric guitar, Pijus – bass, Karolis – drums, and Šarūnas – vocals, lyrics and guitar.

"Judu" in Lithuanian can refer to movement, both external and internal, to processes of change and transformation. Over time, everything shifts, illusions or former beliefs collapse or transform, new perspectives can emerge, and life remains unpredictable. In a way, our music is an attempt to sense and trace those movements and transformations.

Q: When and why did Judu start?

The very beginning goes back to around 2014, when Domantas and Šarūnas would occasionally play and write music together. Later, around 2020, after releasing the home recorded EP Drungnas, we adopted the name Judu and received an invitation to perform live at the festival Mėnuo Juodaragis in 2021. Since then, we've grown into a full band with additional members and remain active today.

We initially came together because we felt a lack of the kind of music we personally enjoy in Lithuania, mainly shoegaze, post-rock, dream pop and related genres. In part, there was a desire to fill that gap, but more importantly, we simply wanted to try creating something based on intuition, to write lyrics in Lithuanian, and to bring different musical influences together. At its core, it came out of friendship and just hanging around in the small town we grew up in, in abandoned places, on rooftops, listening to music together.

Q: The tags on "Drungnas" are quite the mouthful — alternative, desert rock, dream pop, experimental, post-punk, shoegaze, and more. Do you actually identify with all of these, or is tagging music on Bandcamp just something you do without losing much sleep over it?

Probably the second option. Genres can be useful as rough signposts, but we never found one that would describe our music very precisely. The tags were more like hints toward different elements that might appear in the sound, heavy guitars, atmospheric layers or more introspective moments, but never one thing defined. We don't really think in genres while writing, the music usually comes from a mood or a texture first, so it ends up being a choice between tagging many genres or just using one that's quite abstract.

Q: The title track opens in a rather melancholic and introspective way before shifting into something more intense and rhythmically driven around the three-minute mark. Was that contrast intentional from the start, or did it develop naturally during the writing process? And is there a deliberate logic to how the songs are structured, or do they tend to evolve organically?

It developed organically, often our songs begin with a stripped down guitar riff and lyrics, and then the structure reveals itself while we play with it. The shift in the title track wasn't planned as a contrast, it was more a natural escalation of the same emotional tone. The sense of contrast probably comes from the dynamic between each of us, different approaches and different sensibilities intersecting. There is usually some internal logic guiding the structure, but it's rarely mapped out in advance, it's more about listening to where the piece seems to want to go, it's always less interesting when music comes from a predefined logic, for us it has to come from a more subliminal and intuitive place.

Q: "Viskas Juda Aplink" brings in hard electronic beats that pull the music in a noticeably different direction. How important is rhythm as a compositional tool for you, and how do you balance that against the more atmospheric, guitar-driven side of the music?

Rhythm is quite important for us, but the way it appears in the process is not always straightforward. Quite often, the drums actually come after the guitars, which is maybe the opposite of how it's "supposed" to work. So the rhythmic side of the music is shaped by what's already happening in the guitar layers and the drums often respond to that rather than lead it. So, the balance between rhythm and atmosphere usually comes through working with the material rather than deciding it in advance. Viskas Juda Aplink is a bit of an exception, it originally started as an instrumental piece by Domantas, and only later Šarūnas wrote lyrics for it. It ended up being the most different track on the record, maybe because it was created more separately, rather than evolving together with the rest of the material.

With the newer songs, the process has shifted quite a bit, all four of us shape the music together. We develop it through playing in the same space, and each of us brings a very different feeling into it. Those differences tend to blend into something abstract, often somewhere between happy and sad. In that sense, we've slowly been reinventing how we approach making music.

Q: Looking back at "Drungnas" now, is there anything you would approach differently?

Every recording captures a particular moment and set of limitations, if we recorded it today it would probably sound different simply because we approach the process of recording and sound in general differently now. But that's also part of the value of it, it reflects where we were at the time and it's quite raw, so rather than wanting to change it, we see it as a diary entry of that phase.

Q: Four years passed between "Drungnas" and the 2025 live release "Signalai". What happened in that time, and what eventually brought new material forward?

Our process tends to move in phases, sometimes it's more quiet and sometimes we get a more active phase. Domantas was spending quite a large part of his time in London, living between here and there, so there is often physical distance between us.

Still, throughout those years, we played occasional shows in Vilnius and Kaunas, kept writing, and continued developing ideas. We already have quite a lot of material, even enough for another album.

The main challenge was figuring out how to properly record, mix, and master all these musical ideas. It seems like we're finally getting there, as we're now finishing our debut album.

Q: The 2025 "Signalai" release is a live recording — and with only one studio EP to your name so far, it is a notable choice to put out a live performance rather than new studio material. Where did the concert take place, and what was the reasoning behind releasing it? How does the live version of these songs differ from the studio recordings — do you tend to vary the arrangements or the character of the songs on stage?

Yes, it's a slightly unusual decision, but the live versions of the songs had developed their own character. Some arrangements became heavier, others more spacious, and the energy of the performance changed how the pieces felt. Recording that moment seemed more honest than trying to immediately turn everything into a polished studio release.

The concert took place in Vilnius, at Elektrinė roof terrace. For us, live performances usually open the songs up a bit more, tempos can shift, sections become longer and sometimes entirely new and different. It's less about reproducing the recorded version and more about letting the material breathe in the room, also, our recordings have quite a bit of guitar layers, so playing live often requires choosing what to emphasise. This recording captured that sense of immediacy.

Q: Vilnius has its own particular character. Does the city feed into the music in any way, or do you feel fairly detached from any local scene?

In terms of location, all of us in the band come from different parts of Lithuania. Vilnius is more or less where we're based now, although Domantas still moves between Vilnius and London. We've organised and played a number of shows together with different alternative bands, not only from Vilnius. These include Skafandras, Pigeon Is My Friend, Gija, Imanuelis Kantas, Vartai and others.

Q: What artists or scenes — Lithuanian or otherwise — have been shaping what Judu sounds like now?

Different members bring different influences into the band. Pijus is probably the most formally trained musician, he went to music school. Šarūnas and Domantas tend to bring more intuition into the process, along with influences from shoegaze, post-punk, and post-rock. Karolis has a somewhat similar direction, but leans more towards industrial, witch house, and darkwave. These different backgrounds intertwine in quite an interesting way, and they don't really clash, but rather complement each other and shape the overall sound.

From Lithuanian artists, we've been influenced by Foje, Šiaurės Kryptis, Alina Orlova, and Rasa Basa. Outside of Lithuania, Cocteau Twins, Joy Division, My Bloody Valentine, Slowdive, Cranes, Sonic Youth, The Myrrors to name a few. At the same time, influences don't only come from music, sometimes it's more about a certain mood, something you get from watching a film, let's say something like Lost in Translation, or even just from taking a walk in the sun.

Q: What's next?

At the moment, we're finishing our debut album. It should be released this year. Alongside it, we'll be announcing shows and also releasing a music video.

Judu — Drungnas

Lithuania | Alternative, Post-Punk, Shoegaze | 2021

Release: `https://judu.bandcamp.com/album/drungnas`

The tags are a mouthful indeed. They attempt to portray a lot, while in the end one has to acknowledge that it all, especially in combination, says way too little. They are too abundant, they set odd expectations, and this is apparent once the first track is over and the second one has started. Sometimes less is better, and this release could definitely benefit from less.

"Drungnas", the opener and title track of this release, is actually quite interesting. The track opens with a peculiar kind of riff, which sounds off and captivating at the same time. The odd rhythmic pattern is what makes one wonder, feel confused, and feel intrigued. The immediate question that arises is how the band will follow this through. Will it only be an initial idea that will later be replaced by something else, or will it see an alteration in style and character the longer the track goes on?

The track drowns in melancholy. Everything drowns in a steady flow of minimal lyrics. A single guitar with heavy reverb sets the stage, with occasional additional elements. Roughly 1:20 into the track, its character shifts toward rock territory. A different type of guitar makes an appearance, drums enter the scene and the sound becomes more voluminous. The initial motif is picked up by the strings and developed further. Why the band switched over to distorted guitars at 2:55 is beyond me, but there you go. An intense disruption creates a stark counterpoint to the initial calm performance. It is a type of alternative rock from that point on, with the introductory motif relegated to the background. The guitars and drums drive the music forward with sudden intensity and what had been a rather introspective and melancholic piece of music evolves into something very different. Rather interesting, one has to admit.

“Viskas Juda Aplink” is the second track, and it opens with hard electronic beats, which shift the mood in an entirely different direction. The beat is the kind found in post-punk bands, with (post-)Gothic influences. The track is built upon Judu’s unwavering rhythmic pattern, which serves as the structural basis for the melodic keyboard arrangements and vocal lines. Maybe there has been some intention behind the release, but it is hard to grasp from the music alone.

The ep closes with the track “Indigo”. Somehow, and weird as this may sound, the track merges the two earlier concepts. First the melancholic setting again, then the intense rhythmic beats, though they appear a bit more muted this time around. It is here that the “desert rock” makes a brief appearance. It is the longest piece of music on this album, and it presents a steady and rarely changing concept. Furthermore, at its core it is rock, with a solid melody and atmosphere.

Personally, half of the tags could easily be removed. But leaving this aside, it is actually an interesting release. There are some nice ideas and even though they do not come over as utterly convincing, some nice sparks can be found here and there.

Interviews

Disemballerina

USA | Folk, Avant-garde, Neoclassical

Bandcamp: `https://disemballerinapdx.bandcamp.com/`

Q: Who are you, and where are you from?

Ayla: Ayla. Born in Alabama, grew up in Texas, but lived in Oregon for 17 years. I was drawn to Oregon after visiting the area in the late 90s to visit my mother's friends from her time as a professor in Eugene in the 70s, and seeing a lot of the beautiful state. I just turned 44 in February.

Myles: I am Myles, I am a proud 4th generation Philadelphian, determined to die in my home city. I've also spent time living in New York City, Baltimore and Oregon over the years.

Jennifer: I am Jennifer and I'm from New Jersey.

Q: Can you elaborate a bit about the band name Disemballerina?

Ayla: If I recall correctly, our Myles and with our original cellist Melissa Collins together came up with the name? But Myles can correct me!

Myles: Sort of; many years ago, I had a straight friend who I was in love with during a particularly dark period of my alcoholism and drug use. He'd often rant to me about how, someday, we'd have this incredible hypothetical band together that would tour and do all this epic stuff. In my delusion and infatuation. It was something I held onto pretty tightly. Said "band" also never seemed sober enough to actually rehearse, though, despite my effort to get the project off the ground. This friendship eventually broke my heart and he moved to another city, but to his credit, also gave me his blessing when I asked later down the line to use the absurd band name he initially suggested for our imaginary project. The best revenge is living well..? I don't know. It's a silly name that we've gotten a fair amount of flack for, mostly from basic bitches who name their projects after tired cliches, but there is a lurking sincere sadness underneath the play on words that redeems it all for me. No matter what the world thinks, it has personal meaning to me. It's also always been an empowerment reference; when I hear it, I imagine this kind of surreal effeminate black swan type underdog character continuously pirouette-ing and machete-ing through scene after scene in a psychedelic battlefield of a ballet.

Q: Who are the members of Disemballerina, and what instruments does each person play?

Ayla: There have been a few incarnations over the years, but in final or most recent form it has been Myles on viola, harp, mandola, audio samples, etc; Jennifer Christensen on cello, harp; Me on various guitars, bajo quinto, bandola, audio samples

Q: How did Disemballerina start, and what drew you to create this particular kind of music?

Myles: I moved to Portland in what, 2008..?

Ayla: Myles moved to Portland from Philadelphia, having originally found me on Myspace when searching for other queer bike messengers in the world. We struck up a friendship and started to play music together around

the time. Melissa Collins and I started playing music together as well, having both lived in the same shared house at various times and having mutual friends. We teamed up and the band was born soon after, as well as lifelong friendships. Marit Schmidt (viola) and Fiona Petra (violin, dance..) have also been fellow collaborators and live performers in previous years of the band, and are featured on various releases.

Myles: I knew our first cellist Melissa from playing punk shows in squats with louder bands on the east coast, and when I first arrived in Portland, the guitarist from Graves at Sea had her and I record strings for a side project of his. The album to my knowledge never came out, but it got the two of us playing together finally, which was fantastic. Ayla and I were already writing separately around the same time and things fell into place pretty naturally. At the end of the day, we were 3 queer people that were drawn together as friends and anomalies in the metal scene, and we were inspired by the challenge of depicting emotional heaviness without the required volume and gear associated with card carrying members of the genre. After recording our first demo, Melissa moved to Salt Lake city and became a Luthier. We had some other members in between, before finding our principal cellist Jennifer. Everything felt solid after that. She's a gift.

Jennifer: Aww! Thank you, Myles! I had moved to Olympia and told everyone I could that I was looking to play music all the time, willing to fill in for band members, do session work, etc. Almost right away, I was asked to fill in last minute (a few hours before) at a venue in Olympia called Sizizis for a band that had cancelled. I had an unfinished solo cello piece I had been working on, which I decided to perform. The cello piece wasn't enough to fill the time I agreed to occupy so I brought my classical guitar and performed "The Goat Song", a song I wrote/performed at a primitivist gathering in the Weminuche Wilderness a few years before and a doomy version of "Où va la chance?" by Françoise Hardy. I didn't know beforehand that Disemballerina was headlining that show. I had heard/loved the Disemballerina demo while I was living in Colorado and offered to play cello with them if they ever wanted to do that. Thankfully, we did connect and start playing soon after that!

Q: Could you guide us through your discography? What are the key moments or shifts across your releases from the early days to now?

Ayla: I feel like it kind of started as an "acoustic metal"-ishhh group originally. On the last EP, I am not even sure! But we truly always tried to be authentic and thoughtful, from the heart and mind. Nowadays, honestly I would like to explore playing gentle, quiet electric guitar more, as well as acoustic instruments as well.

Myles: yeah initially, I think we formed on a very loose idea that I described earlier on; essentially extracting the sort of drama of metal and applying it out of context to chamber music, but not in a campy cover band way like some string quartet playing Metallica. We've always kind of been our own thing, despite various subcultures trying to latch on and "claim" us. It never worked. Disemballerina is a mutant beast I have yet to see cloned successfully. Metalheads took us in pretty immediately, which I'm grateful for, but as time went on we sort of got sick of genre parameters and I've always hated gatekeepers. Coincidentally, the later bills we were put on paired us with a gratefully wider catalogue of projects; everything from Cumbia to my now deceased fucking legend of a friend Dax Pierson programming electronic music with a device on his tongue from his wheelchair. Rest in power. As Ayla has already indicated, there have been a number of shifts with band members since we initially formed that has shaped our discography significantly. I remember after Melissa left the group, for a moment I was unclear what would unfold. A blog I am forever grateful for, Cosmic Hearse, wrote some very flattering stuff about us and generated a lot of unexpected new press and enthusiasm. We'd only done one small tour and a few scattered shows, so the sudden nationwide—and in some cases international—interest in what we did was contagious energy. Ayla and I were continuing to rehearse as a duo, and even wrote some solid material as a two piece that made it onto later recordings, but I personally always felt we were missing the input of a third member, so we looked constantly to fill the void. We briefly had another cellist, Celeste Viera, then a second violist, Marit Schmidt, followed by an aforementioned violinist, Fiona Petra. All these folks are incredible musicians and collaborators I'm lucky to have worked with. When Jennifer joined the band, though, I knew we'd found what we'd been searching for and she's been with us ever since.

Q: Your album titles—Undertaker, Poison Gown, Sundowning—carry a weight of darkness. How do these titles relate to the music and the themes you explore?

Myles: "Undertaker" was an album that came out of a significant period of personal loss, grief and death. Ontop of the friends I lost to overdoses and suicide at the time, I was working graveyard shift as a nurse assistant, which I did for many years before and afterward, often witnessing several people pass monthly alone in a large building medicaid hospice setting. The song and album "Sundowning" refers specifically to a form of Alzheimer's PM dementia I would see on the job, particularly the shift I worked. The recording has both a friend's death rattle recorded into a cellphone the last night they were alive and Ayla's now deceased cat purring. The album cover is the carcass of a blue heron I physically picked up and shoved into a color copier, which was how I dealt with my manic episodes at the time and prolonged exposure to death, among other things. I xeroxed something like 50 different species of dead birds at fedex—everything from a severely rotten pelican bursting with maggots to an iredecent regal hummingbird. Somehow I never got caught. Even my graffiti tagger friends are impressed by that stunt. I've since retired that project and am done with having well intentioned people send me dead birds as gifts in the mail. Thanks, though!

"Poison Gown", on the other hand, was a textile and revenge themed concept album. The cover is an embroidery piece stitched out of human hair by the artist Pippi Zornoza and photographed inside an old loom factory in providence. At the time I was reuniting with my lost love of clothing design and sequin embroidery work, which was a passion I'd been long neglecting. I remember randomly reading about the mafia sending arsenic laced communion dresses to people and assassination attempts on queen Elizabeth that involved gorgeous but lethal garments being delivered as trojan horse style gifts. I got inspired by this idea of sort of secret stealth warfare unique to queer people and femmes, ballroom coded cruelty, meticulous obsession level crafts with sinister intentions, and this almost loving way of creating something beautiful to kill a very specific enemy.

I also have noticed over the years that whenever we name a record, this sort of unintended double entendre will inevitably occur later; in the case of "Undertaker", originally a death themed title, we had to record the entire album twice due to an incompetent misogynist ruining the first effort. Thus, "Undertaker" became a gruelling actual undertaking. Shout out to Ayla for re-recording it at home, and for Tad Doyle for mastering it afterward. That was a ton of work.

Similarly, "Poison Gown", originally intended as fashion themed crosshair, became it's own meticulous contaminating craft, the art came together incredibly slow, the liner notes were painstakingly stitched, I spent all this time designing dresses to ornament the pages, we had a miscommunication with our record label that further delayed the pressing process. By the time we were physically holding the vinyl, I had left Portland for a boyfriend in NYC, we were all living in different cities and our band was on the same hiatus we're on now. Despite our best efforts, we had poisoned ourselves with our very involved creation.

Q: What works of art or writing have influenced you over the years? I noticed "Thieves' Oil" references a legend from the Black Death, and your debut opens with "Saturn Return," an astrological reference to life transitions.

Myles: me, specifically? I make regular pilgrimages to the cloisters in NYC to stand in the presence of the unicorn tapestries and have been doing this since I was a small child. I love Leonora Carrington's paintings and surrealist writing. I also enjoy Jean Genet, Octavia Butler, Jerzy Kosinski, Sarah Schulman, David Wojnarowicz and Jane Gaskell. In the fashion world I appreciate Alexander McQueen and Iris Van Herpin. Sergei Parajanov, Toshio Matsumoto and Nobuiko Obatashi did some fun films. I re-watched Who's afraid of Virginia Wolf recently and it really resonated with me. Don't get me started I enjoy rabbit holes too much.

As far as stuff that has influenced our songs, we've at different points referenced the later Oz books, the tragic art of bullfighting, an anonymously reported woman who decapitated her rapist in Turkish news, a friend's drowning in Oregon, a poisonous flower I almost died ingesting, corvid intelligence in nature, the fragrant combination of herbs that made graverobbing possible, astrology, relationship mourning and a baroque melody of unknown origin.

Ayla: So many things have influenced the music, and Us over the years. I am grateful for Myles turning me on to so much music and art, including Leonora Carrington as he mentioned, which led me to Remedios Varo, probably my favourite of all the ex-patriot surrealists of that era. Incredible stuff. Also poets from my youth: EE Cummings, Neruda, Rimbaud, Baudelaire, Sappho, Rumi, Whitman, L.Ferlinghetti (who I'd known but first actually read on the above-mentioned first trip to Oregon actually!), etc. Also a zillion films (including the very influential Return to Oz, particularly the Mombi palace scenes!). Also right around the birth of the band, I had just discovered Górecki's "Symphony of Sorrowful Songs" with help from the associate at the Music Millennium classical room in Portland, which changed me forever. Also during the early days of the band I discovered Derek Jarman's The Angelic Conversation, which is to this day my favorite queer film ever. Highly recommended. The soundtrack is done by Coil, Shakespeare sonnets read as narration over the 8mm film scenes by the one and only Dame Judy Dench.

Q: The cello played a defining role in your early work, creating intense textures and a mellowing atmosphere. How did your sound evolve when you moved away from it, particularly on Sundowning?

Jennifer: I can't speak first hand to anything prior to Undertaker! For Undertaker, though, I feel I stayed in the background a little on that album as I tried to find my cello voice. For the most part, I wasn't necessarily part of the songs being written, I was searching for ways to complement and add a layer of harmony. On "Sundowning", I feel like the cello serves as the tide going in and out throughout the song, accumulating sea foam during periods of low light. For Poison Gown, the cello plays more of a character in the development of the stories being told.

Myles: That's wild, I never thought about that shift in your role between those two albums until now. Its such a distinctive change, now that I consider it.

Ayla: Sundowning has probably always been my favorite song of all of them over the years. I still find myself playing the guitar parts at home periodically. The death rattle you hear sampled in the beginning of the song, as well as the song title/reference itself has taken on an even sadder and heavier meaning for me also these days, as my mother is suffering from Dementia and it has been such a cruel disease to witness progress.

Myles: these questions are really thoughtful, thank you! Sundowning is a standout and an interesting transitional moment I never really considered before you mentioned it. It's the only song we ever recorded more than one version of. I guess technically there were three efforts? The first time we approached recording the song we had a violinist as a third member, who quit the band mid recording. Ayla and I trashed the demo, and put the song on the back burner to work on material as a duo because we had a festival performance in San Francisco we had to prioritize at the time. I remember that particular set was the first occasion we amplified and I experimented live with a looper pedal, because it felt odd playing without a 3rd person. Later when we reapproached it with a new recording, I record my entire part as a viola duet and layered two entirely separate tracks over Ayla's guitar part. When Undertaker was recorded, we fleshed it out into a quartet piece.

Q: The harp often provides an elated or playful contrast against the darker string arrangements. What role does it play in your compositional approach?

Myles: my relationship to the harp is a strange one. I began playing in 2008 when I took a sudden break from drinking and used the money I saved to buy a small lever harp on a whim. I took to it immediately, but I'm entirely self taught. More than any instrument I play, its always been about joy and blind exploration. I played it for years, using it in everything from a male sex worker art festival, to a Waldorf spiral walk for kindergardeners to bedside hospice work. There's a whole school of music therapy alone called music thanatology, that is specific to the harp and it's the comfort it can provide throughout the process of dying. I owe Jennifer for cluing me into it's existence. I currently play a 33 string harp that I bought when I the shelter I work in gave me a bonus for stepping into a leadership position after my boss quit unexpectedly. It's saved my life, particularly during the pandemic, and has paid for itself many times over at this point.

Jennifer: Honestly, I am so glad that the playful nature comes through, even if to be, it is sort of a youthful, trickster playfulness. I have a lovely memory of playing "Garnets" with Myles in the heat of summer, our

sweaty harps facing each other. I was fortunate enough to volunteer as a music thanatologist with the harp for a few years — it really is an undervalued service for those transitioning out of life. Periodically, I jump back in to provide music for folks I know who are at the end of life.

Q: Your tracks have become slightly shorter on average over the years. Was this shift intentional, or did it emerge naturally as your music evolved?

Myles: I didn't notice until you just mentioned it now? I will say that on the first demo, the songs were significantly longer, which was a fact that stood out to me because we essentially recorded the entire first record live in someone's kitchen. It was a wild stunt to pull off, looking back. I love droning on and multiple movements. I also like shifting parts rapidly in a short, focused piece.

Jennifer: I didn't notice this either. I think there were more chapters to the stories we wanted to tell.

Ayla: Ha, I definitely noticed, since I initially used to write these long, slowwww droning doomy acoustic guitar songs entirely sometimes as a song skeleton, before Myles and Melissa added string parts (first demo era). Basically just eternal funeral doom parts on down-tuned acoustic guitar. But yes we branched out a lot in subsequent albums with tempo, time signature, and song length. It was actually really freeing and nice sometimes to write (what I consider to be) concise songs.

Q: Fawn introduced disturbing dissonance and spasms of sound that felt like a breakdown of harmony. How does this relate to the album's themes, and what were you aiming to convey?

Myles: the material on Fawn was recorded as essentially bonus tracks written after the album poison gown completed. We did it in a rush the week I moved away from Portland. The songs sat unmixed and unmastered for a few years, because of life being generally chaotic, then COVID hit. I worked my dayjob in NYC the entire pandemic, so it wasn't so much that I had the downtime as the urgency and drive to want to release it finally. In quarantine conversations with Ayla and Jennifer we discussed themes that emerged re-listening to the recordings with fresh ears and we decided it was best framed as a sort of trauma response specific concept mini album, maybe some bias there given what we were living through. The song "Pancada" represents fight. The Song "Somnabulist" represents flight and the song "Garnets" represents freeze, with the recording as a whole being a fawn response to a disturbing inescapable reality. There's definitely, as you noted, a shift in this record toward dissonance and experimentation. In general, I love stuff like Pendrecki and Shostakovich and if there is a moment where it shows most, it's probably here. I also, as time went on in my playing, I admittedly became less and less interested in sounding harmoniously "pretty" and melodic just because it was more generally pallatable to audiences, especially when I have more complicated emotions to express.

Ayla: The stages of grief. I'm so glad we didn't just let that recording be lost to time, and made sure it got released even though we were all in different states by then!

Q: You've never used vocals in your music. What might vocals have taken away from what you're trying to express?

Myles: I feel like vocals more than anything cement you to a genre and I always enjoyed how much our band confuses people, so we avoided them. I play viola, harp and bass in other projects with vocalists and have nothing against them as a concept. It just never fit for what Disemballerina were honed in on.

Jennifer: I would agree, I think even though we've had discussions about this, it has never truly felt like it "fit"

Ayla: I tend to agree about the cementing you into a genre idea, or people's further inclination to lump you into certain genres. I always really loved the instrumental funeral dirge feel of the music that we brought. It might be background or soundtrack perhaps, but to a funeral march or cult ritual. Which is what playing live shows on the floor, surrounded by candles felt like anyway. A quiet, sort of sombre event. Almost sometimes like sitting in the late hours of the night, around a dying campfire, around the hour of the wolf.

Myles: also a great film.

Q: How would you describe your music to someone unfamiliar with Disemballerina? What is it that you want to evoke in the listener? funeral dirges?

Ayla: sad chamber music. qveer kvlt.

Myles: I honestly don't care how its summarized, just please don't call us fucking neofolk.

Q: Your music has been associated with funeral doom metal, despite being instrumental and rooted in strings. Do you see elements of that minimalist, heavy genre in what you create?

Ayla: I do love some funeral doom! And it definitely influenced the first demo's songs, at least my guitar parts. Nowadays I very rarely find metal that moves me, sadly. But I'm always open! I did love many of the Black Twilight Circle bands and the Rhinocervs comps as far as metal goes. And I am loving the Spirit Possession record I bought when they came through town!

Myles: I second that! Spirit Possession were incredible last time I saw them. Ayla and I were in a doom/goth project called Negative Queen with their drummer Ashley Spungin awhile back. And, absolutely; all 3 of us have pretty extensive resumes in metal, without being stubborn or loyal enough to get stuck there forever. I have a pretty voracious appetite for very different forms of music, but some of our favorite shows were with doom bands, many of which squeezed us in between the torturously loud acts of the night. It sort of blew my mind that people even shut up for us and listened. I guess nothing exists without contrast.

Q: When it comes to influences, what bands or artists have shaped your approach?

Ayla: Funeral processions, Ulver's Kveldssanger album, the minimalism of Low, Henryk Górecki's Symphony of Sorrowful Songs, Honestly even Myles turning me on to Diamanda Galas' Plague Mass, early on in our friendship! But really there are a zillion pieces of music that have and continue to influence me.

Jennifer: For sure Ulver but Bergtatt is the album dearest to my heart. Also love Shostakovich.

Myles: I'm going to answer this one a little differently this round and mention some of the projects I currently play in, probably because they are a good illustration of how I absorb music and collaborate with others, and my general manic state with zero downtime these days: Angel Meat is a duo band I'm in with my vocalist friend Anna Young, an opera trained soprano. I play the harp, run through many effects boxes. I met Anna on tour and later while soundtracking a production of Anne Carson's Antigone, as well as performing together at a Kate Bush festival. We are recording an album this spring with Steve from the band Saetia. And we're all just Angel Meat as far as mortality goes. Nomad War Machine is an improvised death metal group consisting of Julius Masri (Mephisto Halabi) a percussionist from Lebanon and James Reichard (Body Cop) a luthier who builds microtonal guitars out of found damaged wood. They just released an album with Lap Steele Guitarist Susan Alcorn, who died at the age of 70 before it came out. When their record release show recently happened in Baltimore, they approached me to play viola with them in her absence, which was humbling and fun. She's long been a prolific hero of mine and the shoes are impossible to fill. I'm so happy to see that record get a good writeup in pitchfork. Susan Alcorn forever. A Stick and a Stone is a band I've been in since 2013. It' my vocalist friend Elliot Miskovicz' project, but I've been recording and touring with him for years now. We were in the middle of laying down strings for his second record when we learned that both our fathers also apparently played in a band together years ago and neither of us knew. My life is full of strange coincidences and I always find my people. Myles of Destruction is a metal trio I'm in with drummer Tony Secreto (Green Meteor) and violinist Audrey Hausig (Hatchetface). I play bass and scream. We formed in 1998 and reunited recently to play another band's 25 year anniversary show, now we're recording another full length record. Ominous Cloud Ensemble is an AV project led by papercut artist Erik Ruin. I am one of many rotating musicians in the group soundtracking his images and share the band with 2 members of Sun Ra Arkestra. Narco Medusa is another NYC noise metal duo I play harp in with guitarist Jessica Howard (Another Dying Democracy), who I know from the anarchist space abc no rio and riot grrl circles. I also occasionally work with Baltimore poet Kelly Xio, NYC rapper Oscar Marcano, and recently did a residency in providence with Philly textile artist Crystal Kovacs.

Q: Your music feels designed for attentive, active listening rather than casual background consumption. Do you intend for your albums to be experienced this way, or do you see them as soundtracks for introspection?

Myles: one of the most incredible emails we ever got was from a man who told us he'd been listening to our records on repeat for a week in an empty house after his wife suddenly died from an aneurysm, and that it was helping him just exist through the shock of the loss. It completely broke my heart to hear, but also made me feel very proud of what we blindly put out into the world.

Jennifer: I think the music has the tendency to work beneath the surface to unearth memories and emotions and would be distracting to listen to while doing something else.

Ayla: It seems people listen to the recordings in multiple ways. Some in the background while creating visual art, or while studying for example. I think when writing and creating the songs, it was not intended as background music, like say Brian Eno's approach to ambient music. But I love for anyone to receive and appreciate the music any which way they wish honestly.

Q: How has the feedback been over the years, both from listeners and within any scenes you've been part of?

Myles: unexpectedly positive, for the most part. Ayla and I talk a lot about how much we enjoy people sharing genuine parts of themselves with us after performing. For whatever reason, I've had folks unload some very intense things on me after sets, but I don't mind and I generally find people fascinating to hear from. There's been some predictably rude, bigotted and mean spirited bullshit here and there as well, our band can be a target for that easily, but I never set out to be liked by everyone.

Ayla: I have been so deeply thankful that it has moved people, and the real connections that have been made. We have received love from listeners in many parts of the world. Which is just so amazing to me. It is a small rock we live upon, relatively speaking…But this world can be so distant and unknown and ancient and huge and dispersed, so to be able to share music and for it to positively affect people in many places is just such a fucking honour, at any capacity. I've also been pleasantly surprised many times that the brutalest, most heavy bands will just be so into this soft acoustic music as well. And just input from all types of listeners from all walks of life in many types of settings we've played over the years.

Q: Have you been part of a local scene, and how does Disemballerina fit into your cultural environment?

Myles: I felt very connected to the music scene in Portland when I lived there, definitely. I remember our first show in a Gazebo was very well received and that surprised me, given my experiences launching bands in other cities. Our last was a large outdoor music fest. Playing in daylight felt weird after so many years of dark rooms. I generally enjoyed playing to metal, noise and queer audiences and felt supported there.

Ayla: I loved that gazebo show at beautiful Peninsula Park in Portland! My sister just happened to be visiting that week as well from Texas, so she got to be there as well to witness our debut, which made it even more special! It was, and kind of continued to be a scene of punks and queers…and queer punks! But we've played all types of loud and or quiet shows, art openings, and so on.

Q: Since you started the band over fifteen years ago, how have you seen the scene and underground music change?

Myles: I think there is significantly less of a social stigma in identifying your band as having queer members now, it's practically a buzz word these day, but when that shift happened culturally is hard to pinpoint. I do know that, prior to Disemballerina forming, from the time I first started playing in bands in the late 90s, there was significant polarization and pushback from the music scenes I was apart of for being out. Early on I both got physically attacked at shows I played and received threatening calls on more than one occasion for events I set up in Philly. Beyond the obvious instances of homophobia, many well intentioned people would tell me

that merely mentioning queerness would cheapen and doom my projects to gimmickery and identity politics novelty, record reviews would often go above and beyond to write discouraging cruel stuff and I was very aware of the glass ceiling that queer musicians hit, because I'd see it so clearly in a lot of my peers' efforts. It's part of what led me to move west to form this band. It wasn't our intention, and the effectiveness is debatable, but I think being an instrumental project also snuck us under a lot of people's radar who might've been initially turned off by that detail. It still blows my mind to get emails from countries where being queer is illegal. Beyond that, I have noticed generally more trans people playing in bands now, which I really love. Similarly, and just as positively, I see a lot more non-white people contributing and taking up much needed space subculturally. Black and Brown folks and POC have always been involved and have created entire music genres for that matter, but stuff just seems way more prominent, intentional and organized now, for whatever my old gay white opinion is even worth in this conversation. Case in point: A really good friend of mine who I look up to, Raed, runs a Southwest Asian and Northwest African fest annually called Yallapunk and I see similar efforts popping up in other cities I've lived in over the years, such as Break Free Fest, the universe is lit fest and Latin Punk Fest in Philly. I always enjoy witnessing marginalized folks step into their own power and music is a great method to go about doing it in, theory tested. It makes me happy, even though there is tons more work to do.

Q: Can you describe your live performances? Are you still performing, and if not, what was it like for audiences who experienced Disemballerina on stage?

Ayla: We are sadly Not currently still performing together, as we live in three different -and distant- states… It was always a pretty quiet, intimate experience for us and the audience when we performed. There were always candles! It was always wonderful how quiet and attentive the audience would generally be in that environment. I personally hated playing on stages. On the floor always just felt right to me.

Myles: honestly…yeah. Over the years we played everywhere from a yurt in in the woods surrounded by baby goats, to an abandoned traincar at a hobo encampment, to a chandelier filled hotel ballroom in Los Angeles. But at the end of the day, just give us a floor and turn the lights off. I'm claustrophobic, so we have always played in the dark encircled by candles as a barrier. People thought it was some sort of pagan thing, I just didn't want to get distracted by the audience. Plus we practised that way, so it made sense in my mind to perform in the same setup.

Jennifer: We played in California at an old train stop with Caspar Sonnet. I think it was attached to a former morgue? There were lovely minimal lights on the ground which were swirling to provide an underwater effect, along with swaying trees. I thought that setting suited us perfectly.

Q: What is the current state of the band? Is there a chance new music will surface soon?

Ayla: There's always potential!

Myles: I still talk to these two ladies several times a month, between Philly, Texas and Oregon. Ayla still sends me recordings and ideas. We had a really wonderful reunion this past summer. We're all focused on different things in our lives, and it is not mutually exclusive that I fucking deeply love both of my bandmates. So yeah. No agenda, and also not outruling anything.

Jennifer: You never know!

Rahel Talts

Estonia | Jazz, Instrumental

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Q: Why don't you introduce yourself a bit? Where are you from, and how did you come to music?

I am from a little seaside resort town in Estonia called Pärnu. I am from a musicians' family — my father is a professional jazz guitarist and my mother plays bass, so naturally I became a musician too. I grew up listening to some really good artists and bands because my parents were listening to them, like Pat Metheny, Mike Stern, Yellowjackets, Earth, Wind and Fire, John Scofield, and many more. And these musicians have also influenced me the most in my music I think.

At 6 years old, I started learning classical piano in Pärnu Music School, graduated it as well and also studied some drums, percussion and a bit of classical guitar and bass as well. After that I moved to Tallinn to study jazz piano, and then went on to Syddansk Musikkonservatorium in Denmark where I studied jazz piano and composition until I graduated. That is kind of my musical-educational journey.

Q: You've released several albums now — "Power of Thoughts", "Greener Grass", "New and Familiar", and "Back and Forth". How do you look back on this journey as a composer and musician?

I look back to it with love and pride maybe even, I mean, I am proud of the albums and music that I've made. It would be very sad if I would look back with regret or sadness, I think. It is such a blessing to have the opportunity to write, record and release your own music because then you have like a timeline of your life basically. With every album, I remember where I was in life while writing these pieces, what was happening, who were around me and what was I feeling. So all of the albums and tunes on the albums remind me some moments and eras of my life and I am very lucky and thankful for that.

Q: The title "New and Familiar" always struck me as a bit playful — every album is simultaneously both, almost by definition. Was there a more specific intention behind it?

"New and Familiar" for me was about that sensation of experiencing something fresh and new in your life which instantly feels close to your heart or weirdly familiar. For example, a place you visit — it is new, you have never been there, but it immediately feels so cozy, like home, like you've known it forever and you feel good there. This feeling inspires me to create and really gives me a sense of warmth as well. That's my thought behind it, but I always hope that everyone can find their own meaning and the music can speak to them in lots of different ways — that's the beauty of music!

Q: "Back and Forth" is dedicated to nostalgia, to places and people remembered. Where does this impulse come from? Is this kind of reflection something that finds you, or something you sit down to explore?

I think this nostalgia and memories are always in me and sometimes by playing and composing they come to the surface, inspire me and make me create and play. Sometimes I start playing some chord progressions on the piano and the music takes me to some places, a beautiful memory or people and starts to tell a story. But at times, I also just think that "I want to write a tune about this and this" and go from that angle instead. Both ways can create very beautiful and meaningful music.

Q: “Back and Forth” is a considerably smaller ensemble than “New and Familiar” — five musicians instead of fourteen. Was this a deliberate artistic choice, or did it come about more practically?

I am working with two bands mostly — my quartet and my ensemble (with 11–14 people depending on the occasion). The first album I ever released under my name (“Power of Thought”) was in fact with my large ensemble. This project is really close to my heart and I do that as much as I can, but yes, it comes down to logistics and practicality a lot. Since the ensemble is so big and people live in different countries, it is much more difficult to organize a concert, play a tour or find common time to record an album. So we usually play 1–3 concerts a year and record an album every 2 years, that’s the plan.

I really enjoy playing and touring a lot, so I thought I would also put together a smaller band — my quartet, with whom we regularly play concerts around Europe and Asia sometimes as well. I am very happy about that. It is much easier to get around, book concerts and do logistics. Then we did the album “Greener Grass” with the quartet, after that another one with the ensemble “New and Familiar” and then again one with the quartet featuring the amazing guitar virtuoso Rob Luft (“Back and Forth”). With quartet I often like to have special guests on concerts as well — musicians that I adore, we have had guitarists, trumpetists, singers, and I really love that. So, I guess I am just doing different combos at the same time and releasing music when it’s ready. The combos are different, but the music is still from the same area or “style”, I would say. Comes from the same source.

I can say that next I am releasing a totally new project — a trio, and this music might be different than what I’ve released before. Let’s see!

Q: There are no vocals on “Back and Forth”. On the previous album, the opener was an Estonian folk song with lyrics. What influenced this shift, and what does the absence of a voice change for you in terms of how the music speaks?

Yes, on “New and Familiar” we had an amazing singer Karmen Rõivassepp with whom we recently played a concert as well, presenting this program. But on “Greener Grass”, there was also no vocals, it was just with a quartet. And then again, on “Power of Thought” (my first album) there were wonderful vocals by Ida Vermehren and Donatas Petreikis. I usually use vocals as another instrument in my music, not as something with lyrics. I have idols like Pat Metheny, Mike Stern and Yellowjackets who have done that a lot, and I just really love that sound — a vocalist singing with syllables instead of lyrics. And also, music always speaks to me more than lyrics. The Estonian folk song though, I just really loved the melody and it already had lyrics from old times, so I thought it would be beautiful to have Karmen sing it with lyrics. This tune we play at the concerts with the quartet as well instrumentally, but I honestly like this one better with lyrics — one exception I guess. I just do albums with different combos and in the ensemble, I always like to have a singer too so I write music for that specific combo, and in quartet we don’t have that usually, so that is what the shift comes from.

Q: The guitar has a much more prominent role on “Back and Forth” — Rob Luft plays some captivating parts throughout. How did this collaboration come about, and how did his playing change or shape the album?

We first met with Rob when I invited him as a guest artist to join my quartet for a Jazzkaar festival concert in Tallinn, Estonia. My drummer Jesper actually suggested that I reach out to him because he’s great. When I heard his music online, I instantly loved it and imagined that he might fit together with my quartet and my music very well. And of course you never know before meeting the person in real life, but we were so happy and lucky that he blended in right from the get-go — as a player and person both, and not to mention that his compositions really worked together in one program with mine. So it was quite a perfect match in my opinion. After that successful concert in Tallinn, we continued our collaboration — did a tour in Baltic countries and then recorded this album afterwards. Recently, also played some concerts in Denmark and planning some more in the future.

I am a fan of guitar in the band — maybe because my father is a guitarist and this sound is so familiar and warm to me — so I always love to have a guitarist in the band when it's possible. Rob Luft is just a very talented, virtuosic musician and I am very happy that we met and have been able to collaborate so much.

Q: How does your songwriting process typically look? Do you compose alone at the piano first, or does collaboration enter earlier?

I mainly compose on my own. I have tried to co-compose and it is a beautiful skill and art, but I personally haven't found the right balance and joy with composing together as a group. I find it always very chaotic and slow as a process, but I know it works for many people beautifully. I just really like to work on my own terms, timeline and alone, because so far this has worked for me the best. I don't say that I will never co-compose in the future — I am sure I will and I would love to learn that art for sure — but I mainly love to write just with me and my piano in the room. Sitting down, starting to play some chords or riffs or melodies on the piano and then go from there. Quite often also it happens that I am in a random place — like on a plane or crossing the street or eating lunch — and an idea comes, usually a melody, bass riff or groove, so then I immediately record it on my iPhone and later at the piano try to elevate it and make a song out of it. Of course, not all the ideas will develop and become a ready piece; some just stay on my iPhone as snippets of ideas.

When I have a ready tune, I will bring it to the rehearsal and of course then the band is welcome to share their ideas to make the piece better or change something, and then we'll discuss together what's best. That is mainly with quartet that there is more space to change, but the bigger the band (like my 14-piece ensemble), the more it stays as it is written on the sheet — I guess because with more people it is harder and more confusing to start re-arranging a piece.

Q: You've spent time between Estonia and Denmark — two rather different countries in terms of culture and atmosphere. How do these places relate to each other in your experience, and has living between them left any trace in your music?

Yes, actually even between Estonia, Denmark and Lithuania, to be totally correct. But of course, Estonia and Lithuania are more similar to each other and both more different from Denmark. I very much like to travel around and experience different cultures and people. Denmark has changed my life in so many ways that it is hard to put into words. I lived and studied there a bit more than 5 years and I developed as a musician, composer, instrumentalist and person so much. I wouldn't be the pianist, teacher, composer and person in general if it wasn't for Denmark, the people I met, teachers, mentors. I was lucky with very good professors at the conservatory to guide me, amazing musicians right by my side, incredible people who are friends for life now and of course I also found my husband there. So I can say it has influenced me and my music a lot and left a huge trace in my music and personal life.

Culture wise, Estonia and Denmark are quite different, but there are also similarities — I won't get into the specifics because it would take a long time. I am happy to have experienced several different cultures, as in Denmark, Lithuania and Estonia, and they all are part of my journey, leaving their strong mark into my music as well.

Q: Several of the track titles on "Back and Forth" are in different languages — Lithuanian ("Naujas Skyrius"), English, and presumably Estonian. Is there a deliberate intention behind this, or does a title simply arrive in whatever language fits it?

"Naujas Skyrius" means "New Chapter" in English and I titled it in Lithuanian, because the tune is about moving from Denmark to Lithuania — leaving one beautiful chapter of life (of several years) behind and starting a new one in another country. Since my husband (and the saxophonist of the band) is Lithuanian, I am quite a lot exposed to their local music as well, so "Naujas Skyrius" is inspired by Lithuanian folk music a bit I would say, and it is about a fresh start in a new place. So I thought the name of the piece would only make sense to be in Lithuanian. And then for example the piece "Pärnu" is about my hometown in Estonia, but I guess that name is the same in all languages. I always wanted to have a composition titled in Danish as well,

because it was such a big part of my life, but haven't found the right piece for it yet — maybe soon. Mostly, my tunes have English titles, because our band is international and I have been living abroad for many years so this feels natural. But when a tune asks for a name in a different language, that's what I'll do!

Q: What music do you listen to on a daily basis? Do you have some favourite bands or albums?

I listen to quite different kinds of music. Some jazz, R&B, folk, pop, gospel, soul, classical — I don't even know how to categorize the music these days, lots of mixed styles, which I love. I really like Brad Mehldau right now, from the pianists, and my all time favorites are Pat Metheny (guitarist), Mike Stern (guitarist), Yellowjackets (jazz fusion band) for example. From old times, John Coltrane, Charlie Parker, Wynton Kelly, McCoy Tyner, Oscar Peterson and many more. From more popular artists I very much enjoy Louis Cole, Jacob Collier, Kaytranada, Michael Mayo, Ole Børud and many more. Of course I forgot some very important ones I am sure.

Also, to be completely honest, I am not listening to so much music actively these days — I guess maybe because there's a lot of playing and performing in my life that after the concerts and days off I just want silence mostly. I enjoy it more than ever actually.

Q: How do you approach performing this music live? Does the smaller ensemble of "Back and Forth" make it easier to bring to the stage?

Logistically, it is much easier to book concerts with a smaller band, yes. So that is why we mainly play with the quartet and sometimes add a guest artist. With my large ensemble, we can usually play 1–3 concerts a year and I enjoy playing with them so much (wish we could do it more!), so I regularly seek ways to make more concerts with them. But yes, with a quartet it is easier to tour and play concerts and I really love playing with these guys as well.

Q: Do you have a sense of where your music is going next, or does the next project tend to reveal itself only once you're inside it?

I have a bit of sense, but not too far ahead. I know that my next project I will release is a trio album and a bit of a different approach stylistically than my previous albums. It is a bebop, traditional jazz influenced modern-swinging project I would say. Always hard to label the styles for me, but you will hear! And I just want to clarify that this doesn't mean that from then on I will be only doing swinging traditional jazz music and have turned a new page in my music styles. This just means that I want to do and try different projects and ideas out — I will be still touring with my quartet and ensemble and playing music from previous albums and new stuff as well, and just adding a trio to my musical journey. Maybe next I will do something electronic instead, or something with a symphony orchestra — who knows. I actually know a little bit, but won't say anything yet. I think it can all co-exist and I really hope the listeners come with me to the journey!

Q: What was your reaction when you realized that someone outside the realm of the Jazz scene has written not once but twice about your music? What is your opinion on the metal scene — you can be frank.

I was quite surprised in a good way! Very flattered, humbled and happy that my music has reached people outside the jazz scene. This is incredible and proves that music (stylistically) doesn't have boundaries in a way and I hope anybody from whatever background could enjoy it! This makes me very happy.

I have huge respect for the metal scene as I have friends and colleagues who play in metal bands and write metal music and they are incredible musicians. I think that it is also a "niche" music like jazz, so there might be quite some things in common with jazz and metal. I haven't listened to a lot of metal myself yet, but I am eager to get into that world, learn more about it and discover the gems of the metal scene! Any suggestions are welcome!

Q: Anything else you'd like to add?

Thank you for the meaningful questions that helped me dig deep into such interesting topics! I hope people enjoy my newest album or any other of my albums and I really hope to meet new people at my concerts! See you!

Reviews

Aija Alsiņa — Lightkeeper

Latvia | Neoclassical, Classical | 2025

Release: `https://aijaalsina.bandcamp.com/album/lightkeeper`

Released in 2025, this album marks the third output of peripatetic Aija Alsiņa, a Latvian pianist who spent six years living abroad—first in Barcelona, then London—before returning to Riga in 2019. She resides in the buzzing city of Riga right now, which is the country's capital. Perhaps this is also why some songs have a certain energy and dynamic to them. Though, I personally think of Riga more punk in spirit and less in a controlled classical sense. But each to their own, of course.

10 tracks and nearly 37 minutes of music have found their way onto this album, and the general character of the music is calm, piano-led. Other influences occasionally appear, like strings performed by the "NŌNA String Quartet"; "A Dream Deferred, A Life Embraced" for instance. "Fractured" on the other hand appears to offer even a vague additional texture in the background. Its deep and slightly throbbing sound, similar to a pulse, amplifies the higher register play of the piano and adds a kind of dynamic tension. "A Name Beyond 'Mother'" comes with the sound of a singing voice, but the album itself is an instrumental one. The title track even has strings and some small electronic elements. The slightly different nature of it all should be obvious by now.

On a fundamental level, the piano builds up the atmosphere and the character of the sounds. Nuances of modulations and tension enrich the experience. Most of the time the play is calm and playful, but never exuberant. Tonally, it is a mixture of bright and dark expressions; "I am Enough" may be an example for the former, while "Becoming", the opener, with its minimalist and contemplative play is an example for the latter. Generally, though, the overall atmosphere is slightly muted and melancholic. Hints of virtuosic arrangements appear, but the intention is atmosphere and captivation, not display. The tempo is steady and hesitant, the sound is warm and comforting. It fits really well to the flow of the melodies.

The music is not like Riga. It is not a reflection of this place, but rather a counterpoint to the city's inner tension. There is this buzzing chaos that is woven like a thread connecting its old town, its green ring and its river as well as its other parts and by which all hinges together. Riga is as incomprehensible as it is overwhelming and intriguing. Aija Alsiņa's music is more down-to-earth. It is like seeing Riga shrouded in mist. Glimmers of the to and fro can be found in some compositions, while generally the sound is more muted and less nerve-wracking. Aside from that, her music is very personal, which she also expresses on her Bandcamp page: "does my art matter enough to keep going?" And even though she provides an answer, a slightly different one can be offered by a listener and a reviewer: it matters enough to return to it, to experience it and, as in this case, to respond to it. While this short sentence is not a literal response to what she posted, it is still in the spirit of things.

The cover artwork is similar to the music: a glimpse behind a veil and a cut-off. The woman's head cannot fully be seen, and the treeline appears blurred. Aija Alsiņa cannot express everything, and we are therefore left with a Platonic view of the music. We have the sounds, we have the track titles, we have the cover, but together out of these sounds only a shadow emerges. Maybe she is able to see more, maybe to her all is revealed. A slight melancholy, contemplative moments and an odd warmth are the threads by which all holds together. This thin line takes hold of the listener and even through a mist, this person would find their way back to this release.

Elpus — Un ja tu

Latvia | Folk, Acoustic | 2021

Release: `https://elpus.bandcamp.com/album/un-ja-tu`

Elpus. A short and strange band name. “Un ja tu”; the peculiar title of the release. And then there is the minimalist cover artwork as well as the minimalist information provided on their Bandcamp entry. Shrouded in mystery to the innocent eye and hidden behind a language barrier is how the band presents themselves. You may look, but there are only vague glimpses to see. Un ja tu. These words have a certain melody, don’t you think? A hidden encouragement that remains obscure somehow, due to the unfamiliar tongue. Latvian is a bit of a strange language and has some odd nuances at times. While some sentences have a charming atmosphere, others are more than just a little bit … different. This adds to the singular sound of this release.

Various tags appear on the entry on Bandcamp: acoustic, folk, indie folk, Latvian music. So far so good. While folk and indie folk help to place the music in a certain direction, the tag “Latvian music” muddles the perception slightly, as the reader might suspect the music to be of a distinct character. Is there a peculiar and specific kind of music to be found in this Baltic state? I am not an expert on folk music and my opinion should therefore be taken with a grain of salt, but this tag appears to imply more than is actually there. A level of unique features—leaving aside the lyrics, of course—is difficult to see. Folk music, with some dust of an “exotic” language sprinkled over “Un ja tu”, may be a way to describe the release’s gist.

This should not denigrate Elpus’ effort in any way. On nine tracks they offer a wide array of sounds and ideas that do stand out from what is commonly described as mainstream. If I have to use words to describe the performance, then these would be “introspective” and “melancholic”. What we have here is not a bombardment of pleasantries, of jolly good feelings or a jig to dance to, but rather an assortment of songs that appear to narrate a story. Leaving the lyrics aside, one can easily imagine someone joining in with the band and singing along. However, something holds the listener at a slight distance. At times one is more motivated to hum along than to take part in the playing. Take the title track, for instance. A calm melody carried by a guitar, a flute and later also by drums and a piano. Two kinds of vocals sing the lyrics, and these together create a soothing harmony and calmness. A gentle flow, an inviting atmosphere and sound. The title track feels like a playful breeze over an open landscape. “Ezerā” is of a similar character, as is “Nekas nav noticis”. Even though “Pārskrien pagalmu” offers a slightly different character, which presents some nods towards rock music, this is more like a small deviation from the general approach than anything else.

One may not understand the lyrics or be familiar with the term “Latvian folk”, but this should not discourage someone from giving this release a try. Elpus’ down-to-earth attitude is what makes the songs interesting. There is no unnecessary pretentiousness and messing around, this is a well executed and grounded performance by the three Latvian musicians. A charming release with some catchy tunes would be the bottom line here.

In Ruins — Ruthless Portrait

Romania | Doom Metal, Death Metal | 2022

Release: `https://inruins13.bandcamp.com/album/ruthless-portrait`

To offer a ruthless statement right from the start: the 2022 debut EP of the Romanian doom/death metal band In Ruins offers a well composed and produced piece of music. Five tracks and roughly seventeen minutes appear on “Ruthless Portrait” and the songs are arranged in a somewhat strange way. In the middle, a short instrumental of under two minutes divides the other songs from each other. Even more bewildering is the choice of the title: “Adjournement”[sic]. The band wants to postpone something, offer a bit more room to something, or maybe even require a bit more time to do something.

As can be expected from a band of this particular branch of the metal scene, the music is rarely pleasant. Also, the titles make this aspect abundantly clear: “Let the End Come!” or “The Moment of Death”. This places the middle part in a new light, does this not? A glimpse over the lyrics confirms this perception and a morbid theme runs through this release like a

thread. Though the cover artwork, a monochrome picture of an old man next to a door frame, does not immediately evoke this impression. Also, the title refuses to overtly express a level of morbidity.

Melodic is the keyword here. Even though the two genres indicate a mixture of slow music with occasional bursts of aggressive or intense death metal parts, this expectation could not be further from the truth. The sound is rather like a steady flow of dark and haunting metal with small deviations around a basic slow baseline. An intensity in the expression is there, but aggressiveness is absent. And truth be told, such stark counterpoints do not really fit into the character of this music.

Growls and occasional screams set the vocal tone, while the guitars offer a surprisingly large variety of riffs and motifs. The band even weaves several well-executed solo parts into the songs. The drums follow the rhythm guitar and aptly accentuate the strings' performance aptly. This gives the release a heavy, deep sound. All is catchy and captivating. What is a bit surprising is the general length of the tracks. There is the question whether the ideas presented in the track could not have been developed further. For reasons unknown, the band never ventured beyond the four-minute mark.

"Ruthless Portrait" is a solid first performance. More boldness would have been nice, though. The way the drums and the guitars walk in lock-step leaves a stale taste. Less predictability in the songwriting would have been welcome. I wonder what the forthcoming 2026 album will bring and whether this new material will also present the band in a new light, especially as there have been changes in the line-up.

Jaunība — Daži racionāli apsvērumi

Latvia | Pop, Trip hop, Jazz, Indie | 2025

Release: `https://jauniba.bandcamp.com/album/da-i-racion-li-apsv-rumi`

You should buy this album. Why? Well, the title "Daži racionāli apsvērumi" (Some Reasoned Reflections) demands exactly that, but honestly, sometimes these should be cast aside, and one should sit back and get overwhelmed by a peculiar kind of music. One may not understand the lyrics, but one may still be able to appreciate the sound of the songs, their harmonies and be dazzled at the end. Could the title not encourage listeners to philosophize about the lyrics, even without understanding Latvian? Well, let us take a proper dive into this debut output.

Firstly, this album of the Riga band Jaunība is so different on so many levels that one never knows what to expect next. The odd thing is, they do not advertise this. Merely two tags appear on the release on Bandcamp: Pop, Riga. But already in the second track the richness in the sound, the arrangements and the variations point to the fact that more is actually taking place. "Grupas Jaunība debijas albums ar mūsdienu latviešu dzeju." is the only meagre information provided by the musicians to give a hint of what it is all about; in English "The debut album of the band Jaunība with contemporary Latvian poetry." And this ignites a spark in the listener — one that finds expression in bursts of energy throughout the songs. However, there is no clear and definite direction across the songs, as each song is a new twist, a new turn— something wonderfully unpredictable. "Pop, Riga": that is supposed to be all? That is like describing this city as "Old Town, Harbour". Well at least to a lot of tourists their visit is exactly that, but to those who, like me on several occasions over the last two years, have ventured outside this enclosed inner "hot spot", the Latvian capital is so much more. Just one genre? Give me a break. Why so defensive?

And this is also how the opener begins. Defensive. Or is it shy? Somehow, as if it were unsure about itself, the music only sneaks forward inch by inch and maybe even hopes that this initial nuanced playfulness is just enough for the time being. Even the vocals mimic this approach. Yet what this setting also reveals are the core elements of the music: charming vocals, warm keyboard sounds and a pronounced bass. There are more instruments, of course, but these are the main ones to be found. Together they craft the melodies, which are playful in character, somehow even slightly mocking in their tone and style. They twist and turn unpredictably in the fourteen tracks or in the sixty-six minutes. This level of musical variation is not too far from what can be found in poetry. Writings like these have ambivalence alongside a core that remains despite variations or divergences. Nuances, pronunciations, and emphasis can shift it into different directions. As does the music here. Only pop music?

At some point it may actually sound like pop, but the more songs leave their impact, the less convincing this reduction becomes. There is a 60s pop vibe with psychedelic undertones. Warm music, sweet tunes and really captivating hooks are the essence of Jaunība's approach. The band then ventures off into slightly jazzy and bossa nova-inspired realms, with some really unexpected rhythms and a lot of interplay between instruments. Small interjections appear out of nowhere

from different instruments, which makes it all sound rather “cool” and maybe even daring. So far I have only spoken about the instruments, but the vocals are also fascinating, and two tracks have left a mark on me: “Negrēkot” and “Ātrā palīdzība”. Not only does “Negrēkot” have catchy, dense and compelling rhythms, but the male and female voices, initially only a kind of narrating and later singing, amplify the impression considerably. What starts slightly muted evolves into a whirlwind of sounds that takes hold of the listener. A different approach can be found in the second example. Like the first track, “Ātrā palīdzība” has compelling dynamics, but here the Latvian language is what truly shines. How some words appear accentuated makes one long for an understanding of the words in order to join in; on a side note: Latvian is not an easy language to learn. Anyway, these two tracks, though of a similar musical quality, will leave a lasting impression due to their atmosphere and distinct characteristics. This is quite a contrast to the rather muted and unsure start of the release. One can feel the confidence grow with each passing minute.

The second half of the release offers even more variants of pop music. Rock appears, trip hop in the style of early Portishead and even a calm ballad found its way onto this recording. The richness is as fascinating as it is overwhelming. They really went all in and deliver poetry expressed in a wild way. That said, the production has minor flaws. The sound of the instruments and the vocals is good, but not perfect. Sometimes the drums are a bit too thin and lack energy to support the music properly. Furthermore, their play can be slightly monotonous, but this is barely noticeable. Overall, the music is warm and quite cosy.

If I had to make the case for this album, these would be my picks. “Negrēkot”, “Ātrā palīdzība” and “Aizmirsti” are roughly the middle part of this album, and they offer a splendid combination of ideas, sounds, and atmospheres. Especially the first two have received several spins by me, and the “lūdzu” in “Ātrā palīdzība” appears to have been etched into my brain for the time being. And while not all is gold on this album, as some songs are not to my liking; some shining gems can be found here. “Plecs” with its rock-oriented and guitar-dominated tone lacks the lightness and the versatility of the other tracks. Of course, not all poetry is cheerful, but the atmosphere feels off here somehow.

You should buy this release. This release that is so rich in ideas. That is bursting with sounds and impressions. That dares give poetry a voice in such a splendid kind of way. Look beyond the painted residential blocks on the cover artwork, ignore the succinct labelling of the release, and you will discover a truly captivating assortment of music. Take a stroll beyond Riga’s “Old Town” and get immersed in what this town actually has to offer. Jaunība did an excellent job here.

Kadath — Nightmare-Quest

USA | Funeral Doom Metal | 2025

Release: `https://kadathdoom.bandcamp.com/album/nightmare-quest`

“Nightmare-Quest” is the second of two 2025 releases of the American band Kadath. It consists of roughly fifty-two minutes, and the genre is funeral doom metal. Compared with the debut full-length, much appears to have been the same, aside from the fact that there is now only a single track instead of four. There are also no lyrics, and the mixture between metal and non-metal passages is also there again. All of this brings up several questions: why is there another release in 2025? Is this release better than their first one? Has the music developed over the couple of months that lie between the outputs?

As can be expected, this monolith of a track can be divided into numerous parts. The purpose of this review is to not provide a detailed analysis, but to rather offer a broad overview of the general direction that the music takes. The song opens with a soft, droning background; a violin plays a rapid, slightly varied trill over it. After some time it progresses into a kind of space ambient with some playful keyboard elements and sound textures. Around the 11:30 mark, the metal parts take over for the moment, and they gradually shift the atmosphere towards more intensity. Initially, only heavily distorted guitars pave the way to this new level of sound, while the drums also make an appearance a minute later. This sets the scene for a slowly progressing and intense funeral doom metal passage. This section has a minimalist play of the drums and the guitars, which together create a rather cavernous sound. While at its core the direction and character of the instruments remain the same, there are variations of course. At times the drums are more pronounced, then the guitars switch to a different motive and sound. Over twenty-five minutes later, the space ambient makes a resurgence and is allowed to last for a couple of minutes. But it is a sharp switch to the metal part again which makes unmistakably clear, what the overall direction of the music is to be. And this is how the track ends. A funeral doom metal passage similar to the ones offered earlier closes this monolith of a track.

So, what should be made of this release? For one, it takes some time to get through it and to listen to it. And while the atmosphere has its moments, a certain level of being somewhat captivating, the ideas appear too limited or underdeveloped. If one takes the title of the release into consideration, then one might wonder what form this nightmare quest takes; especially considering that an image of Cthulhu, among other things, appears on the cover. Where is the insanity? Where is all that drives people into madness in the Lovecraftian novels? Also, compared with their debut release, this one lacks the sounds and expressions that would evoke memories of these beings and on their mad realm. This long track neither shows nor tells, which in the end can be best described as a toothless tiger without claws. It may have the looks of a threat, but you can sit next to it and cuddle with it.

Kælan Mikla — Ósýnileg

Iceland | Post-Punk | 2026

Release: `https://kaelanmikla.bandcamp.com/track/s-nileg`

Really good. Obscenely catchy. Way too short. An exception. Among the music by Kælan Mikla this one stands out, not due to “Ósýnileg” being a single output, but rather thanks to the way the piece grabs the attention of the listener. This is a release I find myself returning to more than the other releases of the Icelandic band. A mere four minutes and six seconds, but these will leave the listener with a fuzzy feeling of having witnessed something incomprehensible, as well as intriguing post-punk and Gothic melodies. But why incomprehensible? Well, do you happen to speak Icelandic?

The opening lures the listener with a playful, but uncertain melody into the song. A dominant bass, an accompanying keyboard, a voice texture in the background and minimalist drum sounds lay out the basis for what follows. These take a minute to unravel into the full melody and to let the music off the leash. From that point on, the vocals push the song forward, offering an enchanting performance with the lyrics expressed on a loop. Do they come over as commanding? Are they merely telling something? And does this repetition not get tiring or boring at some point? No, because the rhythmic touches, along with the melody, make clear that little is actually necessary to create something fascinating. Small breaks and variations, as well as a kind of screaming voice, add counterpoints to the performance, but the track feels like a minimalist, personal presentation of music. Sadly, this style of music has not found its way into the band’s material since.

Kārlis Auziņš / Rihards Plešanovs — Still Nature

Latvia | Jazz, Avant-garde | 2026

Release: `https://karlisauzins.bandcamp.com/album/still-nature`

Performative music is what comes to my mind once “Still Nature” is over. Performative in the sense that the play and the melodies are seldom of a sort to nod your head to, something to appreciate for its intricacy and versatility rather than sounds to sing to or dance to; yes, this is an instrumental release, but I hope you get the idea. “Meditation […]” is a term used on the back of the vinyl release to describe the songs as well as their intended impact. “[…] a fluctuation between the conscious and subconscious” is a further elaboration about the intentions behind “Still Nature”. And only a few minutes into the opener, the intent becomes clear.

One aspect needs addressing first. Two musicians appear on this album — Kārlis Auziņš with a tenor and soprano saxophone as well as Rihards Plešanovs with a piano and prepared piano. And that is all.

Alright, “Primal Matter” opens “Still Nature” and refuses to play along with one of the intentions one can surmise from the album title: stillness. Upon closer inspection, does the word “primal” not evoke an idea of antediluvian times on this planet? A time in which an incomprehensible mess of matter created an even more incomprehensible planetary surface? Musically, an initial calmness and minimalism break away into a flutter of notes played by the saxophone in a wild, unpredictable manner. So much for “a meditation”. This is rather yoga on steroids or acid.

Not surprisingly, the aching of the bones can be felt in the opening seconds of the second track, “Still Nature I”. Again a dark play of the saxophone introduces the music in a minimalist and muted kind of way, while a piano joins in a few minutes later with some well-placed tones. Though, the melody needs time to unravel into a flow of sounds and an idea of a melody. But even then, the two instruments never appear to fully embrace the prospect of complete harmony, but rather remain at a slightly uncertain distance. Proto-fragments of a melody show themselves, but more like accompaniment than a wholehearted embrace of each other. Recognition and not closeness. And yes, I am aware that at the end, each of them plays the same notes at the same time. To me, it feels like a cessation of “challenging” the other.

“Berlin 2021” takes a different turn, and quite a different one at that. Initially, the music opens with a variation on the earlier minimalism, then progresses toward rhythmic patterns, not far from tribal music. The prepared piano offers a different set of sounds than commonly expected from this instrument. Sounds of muffled metallic drums — a bombardment thrown at the listener. Maybe this is the way a metropolis like the German capital can be experienced. A chaotic maelstrom of sounds and impressions. Of course, the saxophone dominates the musical space. But does it attempt to add to the rhythmic patterns, or is the flurry of notes an attempt at mocking the comforting steadiness of the underlying “percussion”? I will not provide an answer here.

And now for something completely crazy:

When I listened to the release, two (!!!) notes, played by the saxophone in fast succession with the second one being of a higher pitch and held for a considerable time, in the track “Berlin 2021” triggered a memory of a film I had watched some years ago, but I could not wrap my head around where to place it. I suspected it to be a movie or video of sorts. The only thing I was certain about had to do with the type of the source: an animation or an anime. There I was, sitting in front of my computer and questioning my sanity as well as my collected memories of what film it might have been. An itch made me do a revisit of the “Genius Party Beyond” movies, of which I own both DVDs. And there the sounds were: in the “Gala” short film, the two notes played by the old man, Jii, are of a similar kind as those performed by Kārlis Auziņš. A side note of a side note: in terms of images, I did not immediately think of “Gala”, but rather the “Firebird Suite” segment from Disney’s Fantasia 2000. Mangled things had been in my mind at that point. All of these are related to nature, maybe that is why my brain thought it would be nice to bring these up.

Anyway, “Still Nature II” comes with a prepared piano again, but this time the sound is more a variation of bells, to which the saxophone adds additional melodies at times. Indeed, this is no meditative piece either; at least not on the whole. Especially towards the middle the music evolves into a frenzy of sound, but this time only expressed by the piano, while the saxophone is reclusive. The other parts have a contemplative atmosphere. “Immanence” is a solo saxophone part again and presents a procession of noises stitched together into a melody.

What to make of it all? To offer a quote from the release, “[…] a fluctuation between the conscious and subconscious”. Is there something of the “Id” in the music? What would be the superego? Where is the meditation, the ego? Do either of the instruments have a role assigned to them? I am out of my depth here. One may argue that the disharmonies expressed by the saxophone could be that of the “Id”, but is the last track then a retreating or suppressed expression of it, due to how the saxophone has become muted? Leaving this aside, the best moments are when prepared piano and saxophone play together. That is where this album and concept shine. I am a bit uncertain about the rest; to say the least.

Liminal Erosion — Spectral Thrumm

USA | Funeral Doom Metal | 2026

Release: `https://liminalerosion.bandcamp.com/track/spectral-thrumm`

The first release of the American band Liminal Erosion has the title “Spectral Thrumm” and is a single of roughly eight minutes released in 2025. And while the Metal Archives lists the band as “Funeral Doom Metal”, the description provided by the band is more accurate: “Death Doomgaze”. Or to provide a description to those unfamiliar with this genre: slow and intense music which can be at times very atmospheric, but which deals with topics close to death. Why is the description provided by the band more accurate? Well, the music is not ‘pure’ funeral doom metal, because the riffs and dynamics clearly draw from the death/doom genre. And while this is a bit nitpicky, there is a definite difference between these two genres.

The track opens in a calm kind of way as a non-distorted guitar plays a minimalist melody with a row of chords. Soon after, a keyboard adds a layer of sound. Indeed, the song takes nearly two minutes until the metal part is unleashed. The

standard sound and character of this genre sweeps the calmer parts away for the time being. Distorted guitars, slow drums and deep growls are what the band offers from here on. The melody is a play of chords, which adds a nice through-line to the performance. A bit of a surprise is the appearance of a solo part roughly a minute into the funeral doom metal part. At that point, the metal riffs shift to a more texture-like sound, as they are played faster. Furthermore, there is also a tension between the rhythm guitars and the hovering solo. The passage is really captivating at that point and has an intense atmosphere. After a small break, a reprisal of the previous metal part appears — without the solo guitar — only to break down into a minimalist interlude. After some time the funeral doom metal re-emerges and the track fades out with some additional variation.

“Spectral Thrumm” is an interesting first impression of the performance, due to the variety of facets and the haunting atmosphere. This is about all one can say from a single track. The performance offers a solid mixture of funeral doom metal elements, providing an unexpected twist with the solo part. This track will definitely spark some interest in the later-released debut album of the band.

Monovoth — To Live in the Breath of Worship

Argentina | Funeral Doom Metal, Doom Metal, Death Metal, Ambient, Noise, Post Metal | 2026

Release: `https://monovoth.bandcamp.com/album/to-live-in-the-breath-of-worship`

Instrumental music is a tricky thing, and instrumental funeral doom metal especially so. The challenge lies in the ability of the musician to present music that, despite track lengths of over ten minutes, is still able to grab the attention of the listener and not let the listener go. Maybe that is the reason Monovoth abandoned the confines of the genre and broadened the concept of the presentation considerably. This does not happen right from the start, but somewhat gradually, though even in the opener an unmistakable shift can be discovered towards its end.

This is not a funeral doom metal band, even though the genre tag at the Metal Archives still says so. Much more is going on in the six tracks or fifty-four minutes. Oddly enough, the opener attempts to set the mood with this aforementioned genre, but “fails” in this respect as the music slowly progresses in a rather different direction. An amalgam of two other genres offers music of a similar type, but also provides an escape into faster and more aggressive regions: doom/death metal. For the most part, the band meanders between these poles, presenting music that is frequently melancholic or even depressive, yet elsewhere remains quite intense and engaging. Already in the second song “Crimson Red Wound”, fast-played riffs create quite a contrast to the opener in which these appear only sparsely.

Yet all of this is still not the full story. Aside from what had been written about earlier, the non-metal aspects also deserve attention. Time and again the music collapses, distorted guitars giving way to clean ones; the result is a darker, more somber atmosphere even as the literal harshness vanishes. Towards the end, something else makes an appearance: noise. Like a defiant gesture, an unsettling final chord, various harsh noise fragments, textures and elements distort the last and also the longest track into a trip that might wreak havoc on those who would expect some “conventional funeral doom metal”. One may wonder whether the terminology “instrumental torture doom” would not be more appropriate in this regard.

“To Live in the Breath of Worship” is drenched in facets and offers anything but a conventional approach to music of the slow and dark sort. I suspect that the album will therefore be ignored or cast aside, as the release fails to deliver a straightforward and immediately accessible approach. Instead, the songs give an impression of a compilation from which to pick one’s favourite. Vocals or even samples would have been a nice addition to the performance, because at times one longs for a slight musical counterpoint. “From a Dying Star” and “To Drown in the Tears of God” would be the ones I would pick. The first due to its emphasis on funeral doom metal, the latter with its chaotic noise elements. My prediction: one has to choose, because the album is not straightforward.

How does “To Live in the Breath of Worship” fare compared with the 2024 release “Pleroma Mortem Est”? There are stark differences between these. What had been music with an emphasis on funeral doom metal has received more than just a small push in a different direction. This latest album offers a wide variety of approaches and only returns to the slow music on occasion. Also, the addition of facets from other genres has led to a shift in the tone and character of the music. Aficionados of funeral doom metal should stick with the 2024 output, while those with a longing for more daring and experimental music might want to give this 2026 one a try.

Nebel Lang — Werkstatt-Konzert

Germany | Neoclassical, Ambient, Drone | 2025

Release: `https://homenormal.bandcamp.com/album/werkstatt-konzert`

Music that circles around, but never spins. Music that wraps around a person, but never engages. You are captivated, you are eager to listen, to experience the melodies, but the sounds remain distant and impossible to really grasp. Indeed, the "Werkstatt-Konzert" by Nebel Lang is music that hovers alone in a room and refuses to really engage with a listener. It creates presence, but never movement. This one long song that is presented, or that is celebrated, expresses a character not far from nature. The impact of the rain, the feeling of a sudden gust of wind, the presence of the sun, all can be felt and experienced, but to actually explain their character or intention is as incomprehensible as the flow of music itself.

Chords move in quiet succession. They form a melody. A steady stream of sounds unfurls. Together they create a kind of melancholic harmony. Each variation of the chords sets a different but equal tone for the sound. Reminding the listener of what has been and offering the prospect of a vague variation and further progression. However, a current of sadness, of something that might have been lost, lingers. It leaves a footprint in the room, yet reveals nothing of its origin.

Reverberations follow the play of the chords and are allowed to fill the space. Motifs succeed one another steadily, but Nebel Lang's music does not celebrate melody or versatility. Instead, this work offers a glimpse into a world that is encapsulated by its own peculiar kind of atmosphere. The composition creates a weight in the air, a density that submerges the listener in sound without ever pulling them into the current. One exists within this atmosphere as one exists within a fog: surrounded and affected, yet entirely unable to grasp the mist.

Chord progressions follow each other and a dense atmosphere unfolds. The warm sound of the piano and the comforting certainty in the movements create a harmonious togetherness. And even when the music becomes more limited and reduced in the performance, something of this anchor remains. A change of season so to speak. Initially, the dazzling impressions of summer and then as a contrast the muted winter.

A workshop concert it is. A tinkering with ideas and sounds, of impressions and atmospheres. Only a piano sets the stage; its part is to perform the melodies. Though other noises have found their way onto this album as well. Wood speaks and therefore the piano speaks. The occasional auditory irk, quirk, or screech makes a rare but noticeable appearance. In this way, a level of authenticity and a sense of being is added to the music. Nothing is polished, nothing is removed, all is preserved.

Over forty-three minutes of music are offered here and they come in one long chunk. This is an act—strange, distant, and warm—that breathes through the wood of the piano until the final note pales, leaving only the memory of a season passed.

Nevers — Twilight

Japan | Funeral Doom Metal | 2026

Release: `https://nevers.bandcamp.com/album/twilight`

The first release of the Japanese funeral doom metal band Nevers is a single track of ten minutes and thirty-four seconds. The sole band member is, according to the Metal Archives in 2026, still a member of the funeral doom metal band Funeral Moth; a continuity that cannot be ignored or wished away here.

Twilight's striking characteristic is its rawness, which shows most in the drums. Their unpolished icy sound amplifies the reduced and at times minimalist play of the guitars that is common in this genre. Make no mistake, the flow of the melodies is not a mere ticking of checkboxes when it comes to stylistic elements. Instead, there is a willingness to be nuanced within the genre's constraints. Slightly faster-played passages, quite atmospheric passages due to a solo guitar part and slower ones with a heavy emphasis on the vocals can be found here. One wonders whether this approach is interesting or bewildering, given how Nevers makes use of Twilight's length. Somehow, the listener suspects there is more to this song than initially suggests itself.

This stands in contrast to the approach a lot of other bands follow. What we have here is more of an expression of a navigation through various emotional stages, than simply moving from one chorus to the next. But not all is good. The parts with a heavy emphasis on the vocals towards the end stretch the atmosphere too thin, due to which they are perceived as slightly overdone. With the guitars and drums reduced to utter minimalism, no clear counterpoint to the deep growling is to be found. And the vocals alone appear unable to carry the entire weight.

Eighty per cent of this track earns its place. The atmosphere, the flow of the sound and also the solo guitar elements are well done and stand out compared to what other bands of this genre offer. “Twilight” is a strong, if imperfect, track.

Nevers — Sic Volitum

Japan | Funeral Doom Metal | 2026

Release: `https://nevers.bandcamp.com/album/sic-volitum`

The second release of the Japanese funeral doom metal band Nevers has a pink cover artwork, and contains a single track that is ten minutes and forty-two seconds long and therefore eight seconds longer than the first single. “Thus Willed” is the translation of the title from Latin into English, but these words raise the question of how to place them into context with the visual presentation.

Musically, “Sic Volitum” follows from “Twilight” and offers music of a similar character, but with a little less of the icy drum sound. Or rather this is the impression one gets when comparing the two. One can clearly discover a continuity in the songwriting, but in this case a refrain adds a new facet to the arsenal. Also different here is a greater emphasis on sonic density over minimalism. What do I mean by that? Well, “Twilight” had moments in which the vocals played a dominant role, with the effect of limiting the impact of the instruments. Such a passage is not to be found, as the guitars play a slightly larger role here. What has also changed is a larger variety of sounds and textures. Compared with the first release, a short interlude of the bass as well as additional sound elements by an undistorted guitar create nuances that help to temper the dark aesthetic that can generally be found in the funeral doom metal genre. Of course, the deep growling deepens this sombre mood.

While the variation in the sound and in the songwriting is welcome, this track lacks a bit of the atmosphere presented on the debut release. The lack of catchy elements also makes for harder listening than the debut. “Sic Volitum” is therefore nothing more than a solid funeral doom release.

Nightshroud — Havenpunk

Austria | 16-bit, Dreampunk, Video Game Soundtrack | 2025

Release: `https://purelifetapes.bandcamp.com/album/havenpunk`

I see how the world materializes in front of me. Havenpunk is my destination. Again. A place of my longing and of endless exploration. Already, I have a sense of the melodies from the inner streets, as they reverberate in my still not fully present body. A sense of continuous sounds hovers over the humdrum—the maze of shops, the streams of people that ebb and flow around me. Murmurs fill the air, while sparks of sound shoot like beacons through the night sky. I stand at the corner of the harbour, and the ever-buzzing town across the water in front of me: a myriad of specks of light, wondrously reflected in the water. I want to enter those networks. I want to return to that glow. The vibrant streets call to me.

My steps take me along the docks, while a gentle splashing sound at the pilings gives me comfort and calms my already tingling nerves. I keep my pace deliberate—measured. I do not want to rush my approach, so as not to lose myself prematurely. Too often, someone has lost their head after getting overexcited over the prospect of entering this place again. Truth be told, I, too, am not immune to these influences. The longer I walk, the more steps I take, the closer I get to the boat that will take me across the water, the more the melodies begin to race, to increase in intensity and sound. Just let me be there already.

The sweet murmuring of the taxi's motor and the water's gentle gurgling accompany me, as the rising buildings, towering beams of chaotic lights, fill my vision. I take in as much of the surrounding droning sound as I can, before the overpowering noises of Havenpunk send me reeling. The sounds make my mind grasp for all available strains of sanity to not lose myself immediately. And then—arrival. All lights. All sounds. All impressions at once. The sound of the city. Like clockwork, a tact giver adds an unmistakable rhythm to the noises. Like waves, the buzzing ebb and flow, just as the water taxi ebbs and flows. The journey is nearly done. And then—I am there.

Overstimulation. Sensory chaos. Light. Sound. Smell. All of these at once. Havenpunk in its fullest. A drone of sound with no nuances makes me gasp and sends me reeling. This town is so much, this town is too much. I cannot comprehend all the impressions. Wave after wave of visual chaos washes over me. It takes time to take these in, to acclimate myself and enable myself to grasp the nuances in the overload of visuals and smells. Every visit is the same. To nearly every visitor, these first moments are the same. One always needs time to acclimate, to adjust, and to find a post to hold on to when visiting Havenpunk. Maybe this place requires an offering and these initial moments are the tributes that need to be paid.

I dive headlong into the maelstrom of sound, smell, and light. Though the chaos is incomprehensible, one still wants to immerse oneself in it. But there is a spot I also want to see again. A recurring visit, which is slightly off the trodden path, off the streams that run through the chasms of the skyscrapers, but which still offers distant glances on the spectacle that is that town. I suck in the moist and chilly air in the park, let my mind embrace the nuanced drone of sounds, the minimalism, the lack of intrusions. Only sitting there. Eyes closed. Let nature settle over me. Meditative calmness. I need both. I need both diverging elements. I steady my mind, calm down my inner whirlwind, but now it is time to head back into the chaos. The streets call for me, but maybe not as dramatically as my stomach. Time to eat.

A savoury smell at the chicken shop hovers in the air as a drone-texture fills the room. A slight murmuring can be heard from all the customers, who are not currently digging in the delicious-looking meals. I stare. I look. I buy. I sit down. Food like a melody placed on top of the humdrum that surrounds me. Spices that unfold in my mouth. A slight heat that brings up the temperature of my body again. Each spoon a further impression, a note in the playfulness of sounds. Time to feel alive again. Time to savour the deliciousness and the satisfaction over a well-prepared dish. One always hopes for more, but one will never be offered exactly that. One longs to relive the first impact of the meal had on oneself, but this chance is lost forever, the moment the serving is finished. A deep sense of satisfaction and calmness fills my mind and, like a gentle melody, my body sustains the sensation.

I leave the place of culinary delicacies and venture off downtown. First, only small groups wander through the streets, which get narrower and narrower the closer one gets to the heart of the town. One can hear the anticipation that lingers in the air, the odd droning texture, which cannot be shaken off. All of a sudden, I am stuck in an endless stream of people. I want to point or click my finger, so I may be granted an escape to a different direction. But a retreat is not granted. Over the ever-droning sounds of the surrounding people, surges of sounds, like waves clashing on the shoreline, shoot over and around me. Ah, this town, this wild and chaotic town.

Havenpunk will never die. A place impossible to drain of its lifeblood. As my visit draws to a close again, I reminisce over the clash of impressions once more, as I always tend to do when I have to leave again. The sounds and noises and drones and music have a life of their own here and cannot be extinguished or eradicated. Rather like beings from a different sphere of existence, the deep chasms between the skyscrapers are illuminated and brought to life by these strange lifeforms. Day in and day out, this place will continue to pulse with these sounds and noises and drones and music—all of this and so much more. The lights, the smells, and incomprehensible things fill the air. A playful crescendo that no single man can craft. A town like this will always exist. Like moths, people are drawn to this place and they themselves add nuances of light and sound to something already bewilderingly full. One leaves and only wants to come back.

Pletyka — Demo

Hungary | Punk, Pop | 2023

Release: `https://pletyka.bandcamp.com/album/dem`

Three witches brewing a concoction dominated by synths, raw drums, a droning bass and vocals as a topping. Lyric-wise, the following is offered: "Depressed songs about the reality of being a young adult woman in Eastern Europe", left by the band on their Bandcamp page. Hungarian, the native tongue of the musicians, is used by these "wise women" to get their message across. In a way there is no pretentiousness and polishing stuff or even something progressive. Their sound is wonderfully dated and not polished in any kind of way, which adds a charming touch to the atmosphere. Furthermore, five

tracks and under thirteen minutes: the release speaks a language of its own. Stylistically it needs to be mentioned, while the cover comes with a depiction of three witches, a cauldron, hints of a moon and a lot of green; pink was picked for the tape, though.

Indeed, the music has a peculiar character. The unbalanced rawness, the droning of the bass, work well with the vocals. Those voices create a slight counterpoint due to their "niceness". No screaming or shouting here, but rather a narration-like tone. This is somewhat bewildering considering what the music actually deals with. But apparently, no epics are needed here; straight to the point and without fussing, these topics are expressed. They circle and spiral in small pirouettes, but there is no fun in them. Nothing to play here, only a declaration to receive. "Depresszió", the longest track, comes with ever-steady, rhythmic drums, and these express an ever-circular musical idea of losing oneself amid the rhythmic steadiness of the city. One cannot escape this surrounding steadiness — recall the opening scene of Chaplin's Modern Times, with the stream of sheep. "Örökös Fáradtság" presents wave-like music with various degrees of shifting intensities and escalation; which adds a nice level of tension to the demo.

A good but too short release.

Pletyka — Kedves Kis Gonoszságok

Hungary | Punk, Pop | 2026

Release: `https://szegyenkazettak.bandcamp.com/album/kedves-kis-gonoszs-gok`

Let me overstate my importance in the world of music reviews by pointing to the coincidence that Pletyka's second release, "Kedves Kis Gonoszságok" or "Nice Little Acts of Evil", appeared around the time I finished my piece on their debut demo. Maybe they wanted to tease me, out of a sense of premonition I suspect, into writing one about the new one as well. Well, there you go. I hope you are happy. This new album is conspicuously presented in a similar stylistic character as the debut demo, but this latest one comes with a different colour scheme. Pink has become the dominant colour, while green appears only in smaller specks. There is also no cauldron any more, but rather a depiction of a flower.

As for the music, all is … NO STOP!

What a disappointment. A small act of evil by Pletyka is the audacity with which the opening song starts off the release. What a loss, I have to admit. The absence of one facet leaves the listener speechless. "Demo", their debut output, opened with a count-in with sticks AND the vocalist's throat-clearing, while "Post Somnia" on "Kedves Kis Gonoszságok" has only the count-in. Anticipation: gone. As can be expected, the short laughter at the end of "Krumplimágia" is not able to compensate for this. There's no fixing a broken heart.

Aside from this troubling diversion from an established pattern, the music again presents captivating melodies with quirky sounds. Were it not for the better production, which balances the instruments better, one could easily mistake these new tracks for relics from their first output. This is not to say that the Hungarians have twiddled their thumbs and bathed in the glory of their demo. No, Pletyka's sound and songwriting have become more nuanced and balanced, which means the songs are catchier and interesting. But one cannot help but see the parallel and the character in the sounds already. "Krumplimágia" has some charming switches in the keyboards, and the play between the vocals and the keyboard in "Rákfene" is quite nice.

The songs have this touch of captivating eagerness. A warm, fuzzy sound is a common thread that knits all elements together. Of course the brevity is an issue, but it is its own fascination. "Kedves Kis Gonoszságok" is a good release, despite the sad absence of the throat-clear at the beginning.

Sojourner — Epitaphs

USA | Black Metal | 2024

Release: `https://sojournermetal.bandcamp.com/album/epitaphs-single`

Epitaphs is a 2024 single offered by the band Sojourner, whose opening may surprise for an aficionado of manga anime. With black metal as a prospect, the playful and dreamy sound might catch one off-guard, as mystical and playful piano tunes hover through the air and images reminiscent of Studio Ghibli films take over. Alas, it is not to last and roughly thirty seconds into the track atmospheric black metal takes over.

A catchy melody seizes control, and a mixture of female clean vocals and male black metal screams adds tension and intensity. The flow of the melody is really nice, due to how the sound ebbs and flows. With the bass drum delivering a constant pulse and the the snare adding nuanced accents, the guitars hover above the rhythm section, crafting a splendid flow of melodies and riffs. With a break roughly in the middle of the track, the piano is allowed to add some calm counterpoint to the earlier metal part. This piano interlude is later accentuated with female vocals. About a minute later, the black metal enters again; not immediately, but rather building gradually to that intensity. And this is also the way the track fades out.

As someone who has four other releases by Sojourner, the music on this single comes as a surprise. Compared with their latest full-length album Premonitions from 2020—after which the band went relatively quiet with only minor releases—their current music has received quite a shift in a different direction. Their new material is more atmospheric, catchier and piques my interest in their future output. I am really looking forward to their next album, and I hope to find more songs of an equal atmosphere and character on it. I quite enjoy this track and even though it is nearly seven minutes long, it still feels too short.

Sárkánygarbó — Tiszán innen

Hungary | Acoustic, Folk, Alternative, Indie | 2026

Release: `https://sarkanygarbo.bandcamp.com/album/tisz-n-innen`

The cover artwork of “Tiszán innen” might catch the eye; more importantly, it may spark a sense of recognition for those are familiar with the works of Sandrine Estrade Boulet. I own a book of hers, which shows pictures of her doodling on photographs and thereby adding comments to an otherwise banal scenery; believe me, once you have seen her take on a row of posts, you will never be able to “unsee” what she has done with them. Sárkánygarbó’s attempt is not as daring, but a palimpsest of a rural impression over a different kind of town is as intriguing as it is charming. Maybe the eyelids refer to a kind of dreaming? One can only guess. Sárkánygarbó (which translates to something like “Dragon Turtleneck”) is primarily an acoustic-driven project formed by Petra Kóródi and Emese Tóth, and they’ve recently expanded into a trio with Bese Szórád.

On their debut release, twenty-one (!!!) tracks have found their way onto “Tiszán innen”, while the overall length reaches nearly fifty minutes. Bite-size music is what I would call this and glancing at the tracklist reveals that the longest track clocks in at three minutes and forty-six seconds, while the shortest, the intro, ends at twenty seconds. And a lot of tracks are below the two-minute mark. Even though punk is missing from the tags, there is something punk-like in these short bursts of songs. One translation of the lyrics later, one may wonder whether their approach carries the same weight as punk, expressed without the intensity and harshness; especially in the sound and the vocals.

The music is a down-to-earth take on folk and acoustic music with hints of pop. The music is minimalist and without pretentiousness in sound or character. An honest and unpolished approach is a thread running through this album. The melodies are simple, but interesting, and even to those unfamiliar with the Hungarian tongue, the singing will be perceived as captivating and a welcome addition to the atmosphere. The songs hit like a barrage of ideas, but each on its own is different and unique, which makes one wonder why the track lengths were kept so short.

The lyrics deal with rural-to-urban displacement and emotional struggle. Maybe these do not demand too many words and chords. Maybe sometimes everything has been said after two minutes and a new angle can be taken. This could also be the

verdict for this album: sometimes only a few words need to be said. “Tiszán innen” is a complex release with a myriad of approaches in sound and character. The album is good due to its honesty and the way it sticks to its principle and does not mess around.

Wapstan — Le Nord

Canada | Noise, Drone | 2026

Release: `https://wapstan.bandcamp.com/album/le-nord`

Hidden behind a veil of shattered impressions, of fragmented hopes and distorted glimpses lurks the devastating and haunting piece of music that Wapstan has thrown onto the masses with seven tracks and roughly thirty-three minutes in length with genres commonly ignored by normal people due to their intensity and at times even aggressiveness, whereby music of that sort falls through the cracks of the uninitiated and only specks of their impact can be felt, experienced and are discussed when it comes to horror or science-fiction films, where the music’s role is to befuddle the mind of the viewer; as are sentences of this length to a reader.

And Wapstan is by no means pushing the boundaries of the drone and the noise genre here. With all tracks having a length of less than seven minutes and no harsh noise appearing, the performance is quite enjoyable and captivating at the same time. As such, a deep and disturbing droning environment engulfs the listener, while throughout the album, noise facets add nuances and contrasting disturbances to the monolithic soundscapes presented by the Canadian musician.

And monolithic is an important word. A person unprepared for music of this sort might feel alienated or disturbed by the set of expressions. One has to accept the sounds, one has to get acclimated to its flow, its character and its nuances. Like a visitor from a distant unknown place, one might need to find an equal footing first in order to walk a path together. If one does not accept the special type that is this kind of music, then walking on a common ground is impossible.

“Le Nord” does not dilly-dally with a gentle introduction. Right from the start, the music imposes itself and announces its intention. A buzzing sound opens this release, oscillates slightly, accompanied by additional drone and noise textures. Unlike a Harsh Noise Wall (HNW), the aim is not to overwhelm but to distort familiar music into something alien. Indeed, an artist who came to my mind while listening to this track in particular was Kali Malone and her church organ music; “The Sacrificial Code” for instance. Of course Wapstan twists and turns the sounds, but due to the slow and steady play, one could imagine the same notes to be played in a church. Why not a keyboard or a piano? Well, the sound needs room to unfold its potential and its distinct character.

The “sacral” impression is not to last, though. The longer the album takes, the more “Le Nord” follows down the path of noise rather than distorted harmonies. Already the second track “Le Nord II” continues in this vein and emphasises drone and noise. More aggressive or rather intense textures appear, making the sound harsher and more biting. Also, the vague glimpses of conceptualism, which shone through in the opener, have been largely abandoned and have been replaced by less deterministic arrangements with disharmonious counterpoints. Their extent and impact shift throughout the release, but a return to the character of “Le Nord I” is nowhere to be found.

To conclude: While I am no stranger to noise, I wanted more of those twisted organ harmonies. And no, I do not think that the violent resurgence in the fourth track of the initial approach warrants this description. In fact, the stark way in which the sharp drone sounds impose themselves on the listener leaves a slightly awkward impression, due to their forced appearance. The focus on noise music and the disregard for distorted harmonies, like in the opener, feel like a missed opportunity. And this is the bottom line. An interesting faceted introduction sadly devolves into a mixture of drone and noise. Much more was possible here. Much more.

Poetry

Low Cunning — Inventory of the Shitty Wizard

USA | Chiptune, Dungeon Synth | 2023

Let me sing ‘bout a tale you’ve never been told
Behold, a shitty wizard roamed this land of old
Without his glasses he could not read the map
And what he did instead is to take a smelly crap.

From the distance a dungeon sound does blare,
And keyboards scream but no one really cares,
He’s got no trump, no ace, no card to play
So squats behind a bush to start his feckless day.

Lo-fi sounds and music follow him around,
In style and char’cter that really does astound,
Melodies of simple ‘n’ captivating sound
Of noise and tone in a dungeon to be found

and the orcs that do the stomping
and the orcs that do the rumbling
and the orcs that do the shatt’ring
and the orcs that then are burning

Lo-fi sounds and music follow him around,
In style and char’cter that really does astound.
The tunes that he carries are easy to hum
Just as he likes to drop one out of his bum

But worst of all the dragon’s hoard is just shit
And the songs from the bards are never a hit
And with a princess nowhere to be seen
And in the dungeon there’s not even a gleam.

Let me sing ‘bout a tale you’ve never been told
Behold, a shitty wizard roamed this land of old
He fills the coffers of the village not with gold
What happened instead is that he pissed off the dungeon master and blatantly lied to him about the save throw, even though it was clearly a 1 and not a 16, but these details never ever bothered him anyway. Which means that in the end he was thrown out the D&D group and had from thereon to do his adventuring alone and see where this had led him.

This ends this tale that never ‘as been told
Indeed, a shitty wizard roamed this land of old
Great were not his deeds, so much is known
Only ‘membered for his faeces and the seeds of chaos sown.

Release: https://lowcunning.bandcamp.com/album/inventory-of-the-shitty-wizard

Nerd Data

Countries & Genres

Countries

Name	Count
Argentina	1
Austria	1
Canada	1
Estonia	1
Germany	1
Hungary	3
Iceland	1
Japan	2
Latvia	4
Lithuania	2
Romania	1
UK	2
USA	5

Genres

Name	Count
16-bit	1
Acoustic	2
Alternative	3
Ambient	2
Avant-garde	2
Black Metal	1
Chiptune	1
Classical	1
Death Metal	4
Doom Metal	2
Dreampunk	1
Drone	2
Dungeon Synth	1
Folk	3
Funeral Doom Metal	7
Indie	2
Instrumental	1
Jazz	3
Neoclassical	3
Noise	2
Pop	3
Post Metal	1
Post-Punk	3
Punk	2
Shoegaze	2
Trip hop	1
Video Game Soundtrack	1

Linguistic Data on Reviews

Band / Release	Words	Sentences	TTR	Lex.D	Hapax	Category
Aija Alsiņa *Lightkeeper*	651	37	0.482	0.51	0.742	**medium**
Bellaras *The Thousand Tombs Of A Broken God*	321	18	0.614	0.586	0.761	**short**
Elpus *Un ja tu*	563	38	0.499	0.542	0.694	**medium**
In Ruins *Ruthless Portrait*	458	30	0.535	0.555	0.747	**medium**
Jaunība *Daži racionāli apsvērumi*	1076	70	0.429	0.533	0.677	**extended**
Judu *Drungnas*	515	33	0.517	0.54	0.707	**medium**
Kadath *Nightmare-Quest*	533	30	0.499	0.51	0.726	**medium**
Kælan Mikla *Ósýnileg*	263	19	0.627	0.532	0.8	**short**
Kārlis Auziņš / Rihards Plešanovs *Still Nature*	966	60	0.427	0.487	0.687	**long**
Liminal Erosion *Spectral Thrumm*	392	22	0.48	0.536	0.654	**short**
Low Cunning *Inventory of the Shitty Wizard*	352	7	0.48	0.509	0.627	**short**
Monovoth *To Live in the Breath of Worship*	603	29	0.499	0.557	0.718	**medium**
Nebel Lang *Werkstatt-Konzert*	497	35	0.517	0.533	0.739	**medium**
Nevers *Twilight*	326	18	0.564	0.549	0.712	**short**
Nevers *Sic Volitum*	294	15	0.571	0.534	0.732	**short**
Nightshroud *Havenpunk*	1110	94	0.394	0.529	0.65	**extended**
Pletyka *Demo*	319	19	0.636	0.577	0.828	**short**
Pletyka *Kedves Kis Gonoszságok*	401	27	0.536	0.516	0.707	**medium**
Sojourner *Epitaphs*	310	15	0.6	0.584	0.763	**short**
Sárkánygarbó *Tiszán innen*	460	23	0.557	0.526	0.723	**medium**
Wapstan *Le Nord*	624	31	0.51	0.55	0.739	**medium**
Avg	**525.429**	**31.905**	**0.523**	**0.538**	**0.721**	

Colophon

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